

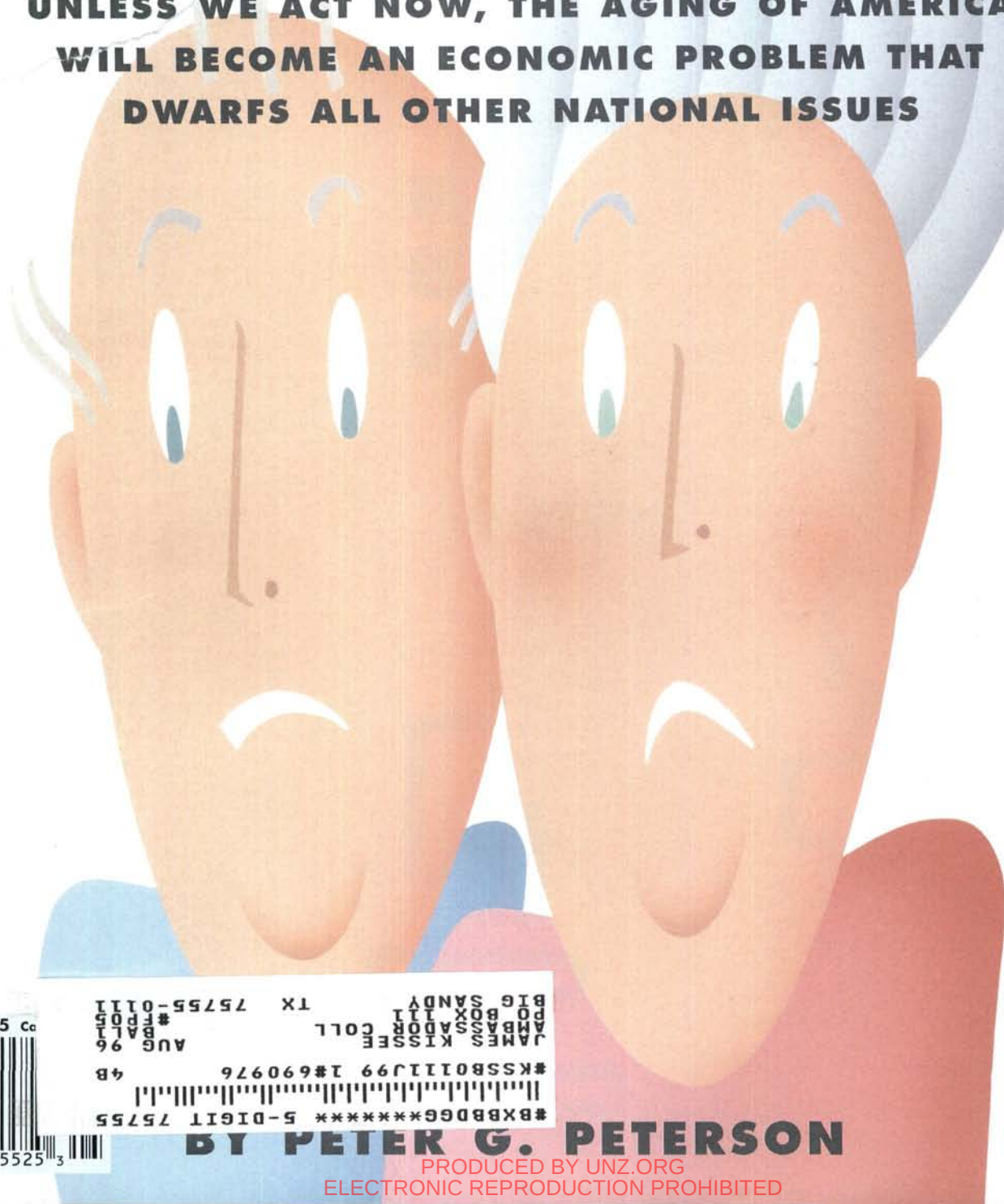
THE HOUSE THAT HOPPER IMMORTALIZED / FICTION BY CHARLES PORTIS

The Atlantic Monthly

MAY 1996

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DWARFS ALL OTHER NATIONAL ISSUES



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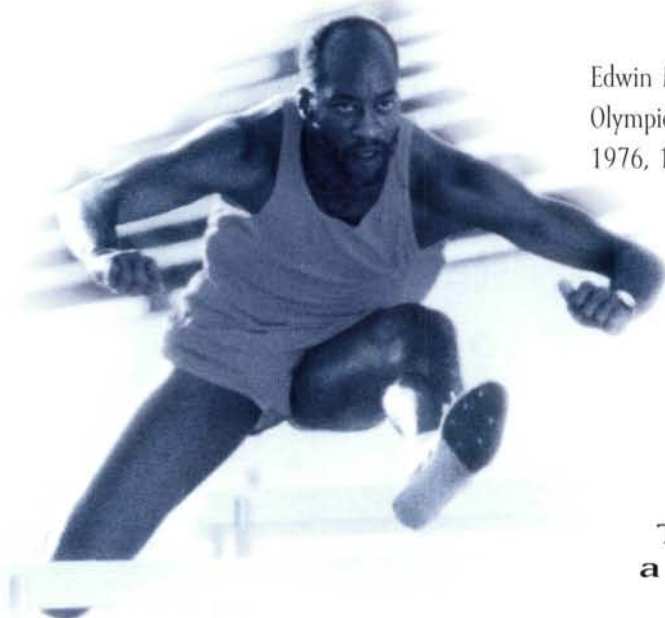
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ELLEN COLTON'S DINNER PARTY WAS THE opening of the season. Her first dinner this particular year was to officially introduce Maggie, though she was already known to many of the ladies who were wearing her Miss Mermaid fashions. Among the guests was Mortimer Sheldon, a leather manufacturer from Massachusetts. He was a childless widower, his wife having died five years earlier. When his eyes first lit on Maggie, his heart beat wildly; he had found the perfect mate. Her diminutive stature, rose-gold hair and delicate features represented the child he never had; her petite, shapely body—a pocket-Venus, he called her—made her a desirable companion wife.

Mortimer had little opportunity to get close to her on that first occasion as she was surrounded most of the evening by others equally eager to welcome her. He left early, his mind a whirl with plans to make her his very own.

THE FOLLOWING MORNING

Maggie received a huge bouquet of roses tied with a green satin ribbon. A card was pinned to the ribbon with a diamond brooch: "Please accept this as a token of my deepest admiration," she read, astonished. The card was signed "Mortimer Sheldon" and as hard as she tried she could not remember his name.

Four o'clock was the accepted time for callers and Ellen's home became the only place to be at teatime (although there were stronger libations for those who wanted them). Mortimer was the first to call that day, carrying a tremendous bouquet. When he was announced, Maggie came forward to meet him, took the flowers and asked the maid to put them in water. As she extended her hand he held it too long and kissed it greedily. Inwardly she recoiled from this unprepossessing old man. He was approaching fifty and the passing years and his unstinting devotion to business had not been kind to him. His eyes had puffy, dark bags under them, his whole being had sagged and his mouth on her hand felt loose-lipped and wet. Although he did not resemble the man in the least, a picture of Dr. Henderson flashed in Maggie's mind's eye. A few years ago, Maggie would have run from him; but now she called on her newly acquired sophistication to handle the situation.

"Mr. Sheldon," (she withdrew her hand wishing she could wipe it off) "thank you for the flowers, but I cannot accept the gift you attached to them. So I reached into a pocket of her dress and held out the diamond pin.

He pushed her hand away. "My dear, this is just a token of my affection. There is much more I will give you when we get to know each other better."

"Again I thank you," Maggie said

firmly "but believe me when I say I will not accept anything of yours if you insist without me. I prefer not to receive anything."

Mortimer, delighted by her reserve, said, "I am very wealthy, my dear, and I can give you all the treasures at your feet."

Exasperated, Maggie said, "I will answer when a proper caller has announced. She tried to drop her hand and was relieved to find it was not the perfect mate. She greeted the newcomer. She dodged Mortimer's attentions for the rest of the afternoon and was satisfied that she had discouraged this insistent man.

She had not. Mortimer was a handsome, extreme youth and an exquisite prettiness and came every afternoon always with flowers and a card. He had decided that, as long as it took to make her his own, he would wait.

One day he caught her as she was leaving her room. He tore the card from her hand and read it. It was a student's name. Maggie but secretly by her heart had said "I love you."

Maggie Mortimer had said "I love you" to the terrace. "I love you," she said to her husband. "I love you," she said to her husband. "I love you," she said to her husband.

John took a deep breath and said, "We've been married for a long time. Mortimer and I'm so busy that I must ask you to be patient. You will see she'll come one day. Mortimer said, 'I love you' to the terrace. 'I love you,' she said to her husband. 'I love you,' she said to her husband.

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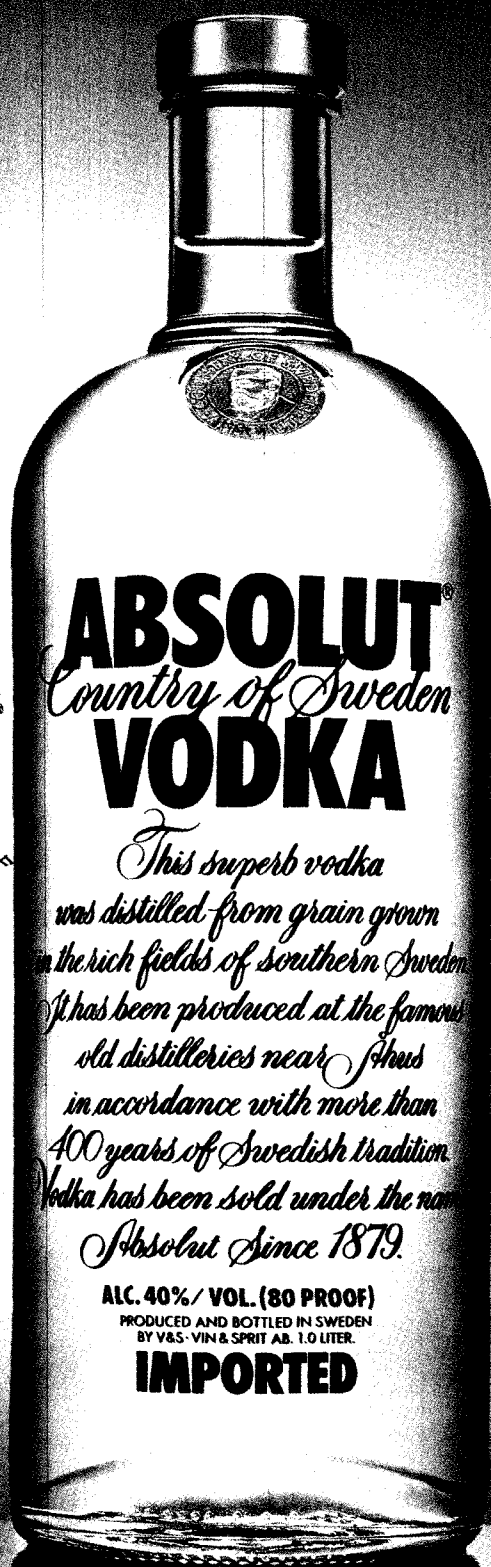
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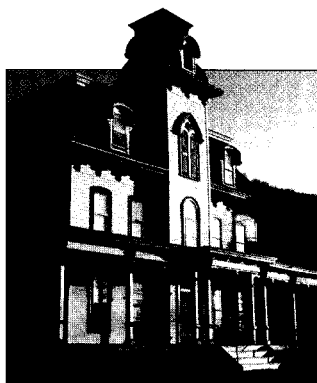
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Page 40



Page 48



Page 104

REPORTS

20 Notes & Comment: Backlogs of History

On a national scale as in our personal lives, a vexing question remains unresolved: How much stuff should we save?

by Cullen Murphy

24 Foreign Affairs: Blowback

In a perverse twist, the "freedom fighters" trained by the United States in Afghanistan in the 1980s have turned out to be the fount of international terrorism in the 1990s.

by Mary Anne Weaver

40 Personal File: Someplace Like Home

Inside a house made famous by Edward Hopper.

by Paul Bochner

42 Politics: The Protean President

Bill Clinton was elected as a Democrat. Will he be re-elected as a Republican?

by Thomas Byrne Edsall

FICTION & POETRY

90 I Don't Talk Service No More

A short story

by Charles Portis

55 Will America Grow Up Before It Grows Old?

We all know that the aging of the Baby Boom generation will have a profound impact on Social Security and Medicare. Not fully recognized, the author argues, is just how devastating the impact will be. Indeed, he writes, the present entitlement regime simply cannot be sustained. We are heading for a major crisis for which our society is unprepared, and only drastic changes made now can enable us to avert the crisis humanely.

by Peter C. Peterson

93 The Nitrous Oxide Philosopher

William James was an ardent believer in the value of religious experience—of which he himself remained for the most part emotionally incapable. The exceptional moments came when he experimented with drugs. These episodes open a window onto James's thinking—and onto our own world.

by Dmitri Tymoczko



99 Vasectomy

A poem

by Thom Ward

102 More Marriages

A poetry anthology

by James Reiss,
Erin Belieu,
Donald Hall,
Stanley Plumly, and
Debra Pennington

BOOKS

109 The Idea of Disorder at Key West

The fiction of south Florida, from Hemingway on.

by Phyllis Rose

114 What Election '96 Should Be About

Fat and Mean: The Corporate Squeeze of Working

Americans and the Myth of Managerial "Downsizing,"
by David M. Gordon

by Jack Beatty

120 Brief Reviews

by Phoebe-Lou Adams

ARTS & LEISURE

48 Travel: In Tune With Ireland

Wexford's opera festival.

by Geoffrey Wheatcroft

104 Music: Finished Symphonies

Muzio Clementi was once more famous than Mozart. His under-known music deserves attention.

by William H. Youngren

OTHER DEPARTMENTS

6 745 Boylston Street/ Contributors

8 Letters

18 The May Almanac

123 The Puzzler

by Emily Cox and
Henry Rathvon

124 Word Court

by Barbara Wallraff

Cover art by
Nicholas Gaetano

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PETER G. Peterson, a New York investment banker and the founding president of the Concord Coalition, a citizens' group co-chaired by the former senators Warren Rudman and Paul Tsongas, which one might say is dedicated to making America eat its collective spinach, may be the author of our cover article, but Peterson's father, George, who died in 1986, is its inspiration. George and his wife, Venetia, gave their son life lessons that inform his public commitments. These lessons echo in every line of his two books and several major articles; the best-known among the latter, "The Morning After," which appeared in the October, 1987, issue of *The Atlantic Monthly*, unmasked the fiscal disaster of supply-side economics and won a National Magazine Award.

George Petropoulos and Venetia Papapavlou were Greek immigrants who came to this country as teenagers; George joined his older brother Nick as a dishwasher in the caboose kitchens of the Union Pacific Railroad. In time he put by enough money to start "the inevitable Greek restaurant"—as Peterson writes in his 1993 book *Facing Up*—in Kearny, Nebraska, a stop on the Union Pacific. Its doors were open twenty-four hours a day 365 days a year.



JOHN MAGUIRE

The Petersons (Nick took the name after his foreman repeatedly mangled "Petropoulos," and George adopted it) lived by an endowment ethic: A better future requires investment, which requires saving, which requires sacrifices in present consumption. That is Pete Peterson's prescription for America today.

"Right now," he writes, "a huge crop of Baby Boom workers are swelling our tax receipts while a relatively small generation retires. But soon those demographic forces will be thrown into reverse." The long gray wave of the Baby Boom generation's retirement will crowd out investment, both private and public, physical and human—unless we act *now* to balance the budget, require families to save more for their future, and enact far-reaching reforms in senior entitlements like Social Security and Medicare.

Peterson served on the President's Commission on Entitlement Reform in 1994. His views have weight. We asked him, Is entitlement reform likely to be debated in the presidential campaign? On this issue, Peterson says, the candidates are either being "constructively ambiguous" or are taking "a deafening oath of silence." —THE EDITORS

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Peter G. Peterson ("Will America Grow Up Before It Grows Old?") is the chairman of The Blackstone Group, a private investment bank. A book based on his article in this issue will be published in September by Random House.

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LETTERS

Hating the Media

There is more to the incident described by James Fallows in "Why Americans Hate the Media" (February *Atlantic*) concerning Mike Wallace's opinion on whether a reporter working with an enemy patrol is morally obliged to warn fellow Americans about to be ambushed.

In preparing a book on the military and the media, I came across a secondhand account of that discussion and wrote Mr. Wallace to verify it. He responded immediately, by telephone. "I responded without having had time to think about the subject," he said, "and immediately began to have second thoughts."

"I am an American," he continued. "I fought for our country in World War Two. I am not going to see American fighting men and women killed or injured if there is anything I can do to stop it. But, having had time to think about that question, I don't think it can be addressed outside of the much larger question of whether the press should seek to get people behind enemy lines in time of war. Once you are in there . . . you are no longer a free agent."

Year after year reporters, and sometimes their editors, participate in war-college symposia and go away thinking they have "explained" the press to the military. But what the military has learned from those encounters is, first, that every reporter is on his or her own, and will gladly cut the throat of any colleague; and, second, that the press lacks the depth to understand any complex story, not just stories about the military.

Contrary to what R. W. Apple Jr. claims in the February 4 *New York Times* "Week in Review," it was not exclusion by the military that distorted coverage of the Persian Gulf War but careful exploitation of those two observed weaknesses. That will continue to be the case until the press overhauls its entire concept of organization and training. Fal-

lows's article and book make an important contribution to creating the public pressure that must be built up in order for that to happen.

William V. Kennedy
Wiscasset, Maine

James Fallows's castigation of the news media is a valuable and convincing alert: a crucial component of our democracy is not functioning. But Fallows does not dispute certain basic facts of news economics that are surely known to him and his readers: issues research is more costly than political chitchat, and chitchat sells better anyway. The hard-news carnivores his article features are not representative of our entertainment-loving citizenry. Polls showing a desire for more upbeat news do not indicate a thirst for elucidation of policy issues. It is in fact reasonable to assume that journalism is effectively responding to its economic incentives, as one would expect. In terms of solutions, Fallows's essay thus amounts to an exhortation to the news industry to act more honorably despite its self-interest—which is obviously futile.

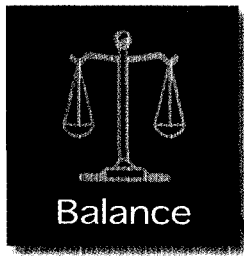
Uriel Wittenberg
New York, N.Y.

On Integrity

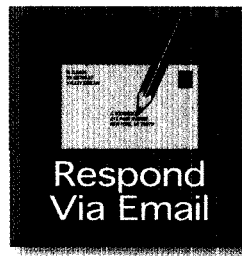
In reference to Stephen L. Carter's "The Insufficiency of Honesty" (February *Atlantic*): integrity has its roots in "in" (not) "tangere" (to touch), and means the quality of being "untouched, whole, complete." It is related to "integrate," to "make whole or complete by adding or bringing together parts."

In reference to human beings, integrity implies that one is complete unto oneself. And to be human and whole is to know and accept ourselves with strengths and weaknesses and to relate intimately with others on the basis of our inner wholeness and knowledge rather than outer

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TRAVELING THROUGH KENYA'S RHINO COUNTRY

Ah, Kenya. What other country, we ask, offers the thrill of dodging maniacal city drivers one moment, and the joy of fleeing a charging rhino the next? Since we just spent several weeks there in the all new Nissan Pathfinder, we'll tell you: Not many. What follows are stories and survival tips from our recent trip through this East African wildlife mecca and sanctuary for driver's ed flunkies.



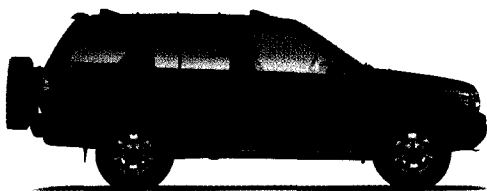
K E N Y A

FROM THE Great Rift Valley to the Serengeti Plains, Kenya offers some of the most beautiful and diverse geography in all of Africa. But let us not mince words: Driving in this country is utterly appalling.

Temperatures are extreme. Roads abysmal. Local motorists deranged. And that's just Nairobi. Assuming you leave the city limits in one piece, you'll then enjoy the additional challenge of numerous animal species that would like nothing better than to make you their next meal. Or, at least, send your car to the body shop for a little fender work.

This leaves the safari enthusiast in a bit of a quandary: How does one visit the world's number one wildlife mecca and come home with all limbs still present and accounted for?

As most travel between Kenya's national wildlife parks is by 4WD, it's important—first and foremost—to know which side of the road the local



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population drives on. In Kenya, this is simple: They drive on whichever side is smoothest. We generally found this to be our side, and most of our time was spent scanning the horizon for oncoming vehicles, checking to make sure our seat belts were securely fastened, and being thankful for Nissan engineers' thoughtful inclusion of dual airbags.

Assuming you make it beyond the city limits in one piece, your next area of concern will be negotiating the game parks, where the animals rank higher on the food chain than the

BLACK RHINO
[*Diceros Bicornis*]

humans. We took the Pathfinder to Amboseli National Park, Shaba National Reserve, and a small ranch called Ol Jogi (built by a wealthy European art dealer as a retreat from the drudgery of counting his money all day), but the same rules apply to whichever park you visit: Keep your windows rolled up around lions. Don't get between a mother elephant and her young. And watch out for rhinos—they'll charge anything. The last point was made to us at Ol Jogi, where we learned that although rhinoceroses are technically herbivores,

DRIVING TIP

Because Kenya was formerly a British colony, one would think motorists would drive on the left side of the road. This would be a dangerous assumption, however, for Kenyans drive on whichever side of the road is smoother. (More often than not, that's YOUR side.)

CATTLE

Cattle are rarely eaten by the Masai as they represent their owner's wealth. (For our Masai readers who may be considering a new automobile, the Pathfinder starts at about 300 cows.)



x 300



some have a distinct fondness for sheet metal. (Fortunately, the three-ton beast was no match for the Pathfinder's nimble handling and we never had to field-test our steel side-door guard beams.)

any attempt to shirk one's financial obligations will result in rocks being hurled in the direction of your vehicle. The Pathfinder's chip-resistant paint notwithstanding, we gladly paid the going rate of 50 Kenyan shillings—about \$1.

With regard to the country's extreme temperatures and bumpy roads, simply adjust the Pathfinder's automatic climate control to a suitably humane temperature and take a few sips off the top of your (bottled, boiled or otherwise purified) water before placing it in the car's cup holders.

Bear these tips in mind and we promise

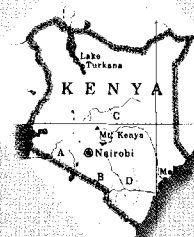
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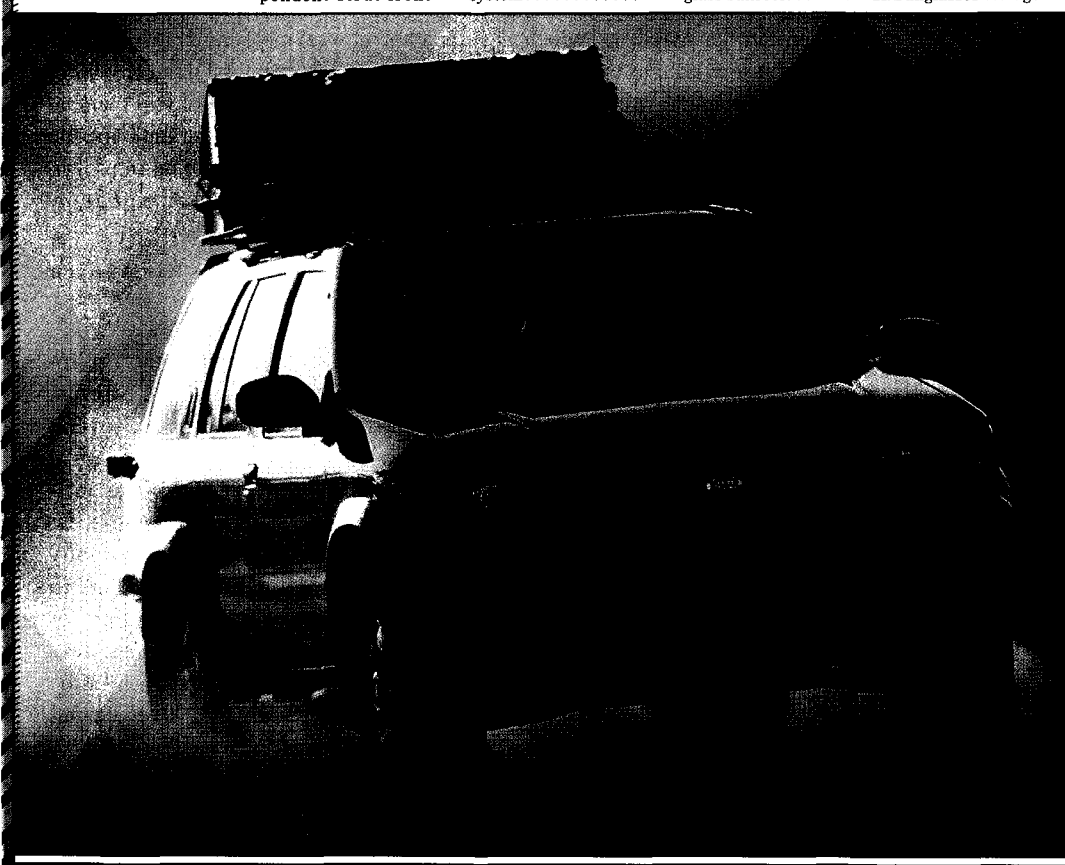
KENYA'S TOP GAME RESERVES

A. Masai Mara Game Reserve. Located on the northern edge of the Serengeti Plain, this park features vast numbers of migrating herds and the big cats that prey on them.

B. Amboseli Game Reserve. With snow-capped Mt. Kilimanjaro looming in the background, few parks are more picturesque than Amboseli.

C. Shaba National Reserve. Besides hosting nearly all the major big game species, this park is home to colorful Samburu villages where you can watch inspiring tribal dances.

D. Tsavo National Park. At 8,034 square miles, Tsavo boasts some of Africa's largest elephant herds as well as the Mzima Springs oasis, where hippos and crocodiles can be viewed.



Finally, a few words about Kenya's indigenous people. Kenya is home to over 70 different tribes and, driving through the countryside, you will undoubtedly see vibrantly dressed Masai, Samburu and other tribesmen walking along the roadway. While it is perfectly acceptable to stop for picture-taking, be aware that these people expect to be paid for their modeling services and

your drive through Kenya will be off to a good start. Of course, there's no accounting for the whims of Kenyan motorists or the moods of the local rhinoceros. But that's what separates a drive through Africa from a visit to the petting zoo.

Right?

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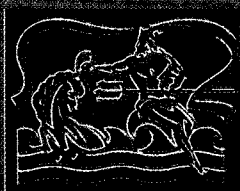
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The Atlantic

customs or morals. Integrity further implies inner and outer consistency.

Which takes us to Carter's dying man. Carter no doubt chose this extreme example because he assumes that most people will say, "Of course the man shouldn't tell."

He's right: most people live distant lives, shut off from other people by what they will not tell. And they have many excuses, the most frequent being that they might hurt someone's feelings. This is a ruse, as Carter points out; they are afraid to tell the truth because they are trying to protect themselves from loss (of power, love, position), from anger, from the nakedness of exposure.

A person of integrity would not wait thirty-five years to tell his wife about an affair, and he would never "confess." He would tell his wife immediately, or he might even tell her before it happened, when it was just a thought but not yet a plan. And if he made the mistake of putting off his telling, he would eventually tell because the affair was a fact of his life that intruded on the intimacy between him and his wife, not because it was "killing his spirit." A person of integrity does not judge either himself or others so harshly as to kill off parts of himself or other people.

Carter's ending for the story, his melodramatic description of the twice-faithless man and the grieving soon-to-be widow who would choose illusion over substance, aptly demonstrates the errors we make when we treat others not as beings having integrity but as children whom we must arrogantly protect in much the same way that Carter's manager protected his employee. Neither Carter, as the story's author, nor his character can assume knowledge of the wife's reaction to her husband's affair, because we don't know if she is a woman of integrity. Maybe she, too, had an affair, and would feel great relief, the lifting of her own guilt. Maybe she would feel sorry for her husband for suffering so long when he could have told her and would have been forgiven. Maybe she would confirm a long suspicion and have newfound confidence in her intuition. Maybe she wouldn't give a damn. Maybe she would give her husband an extra dose of morphine to end it all just a bit sooner.

The person of integrity would never,

ever take from her the opportunity to make her own choice and respond as she will.

Rebecca L. Shannon
Washington, D.C.

To the husband whose deathbed confession of infidelity hurts his wife I say, *Go for it!* Why shouldn't he manage his death as he chooses, doing for himself what he needs to do?

If her happiness was predicated on a fiction, what was its intrinsic worth? As an adult, why shouldn't she be responsible for doing the hard work of reconciling this fact about the marriage she was a party to with the fiction she had imagined? To protect her from this information is to patronize her and rob her of vital knowledge about the reality of her own life.

Rather than accept Carter's sappy deathbed moral melodrama, which casts the wronged woman as a passive victim, I choose to believe that she will marshal the strength to confront the truth and the resilience to learn from it and move on.

Some of the happiest women I know are widows.

Christine Van Lenten
Albuquerque, N. Mex.

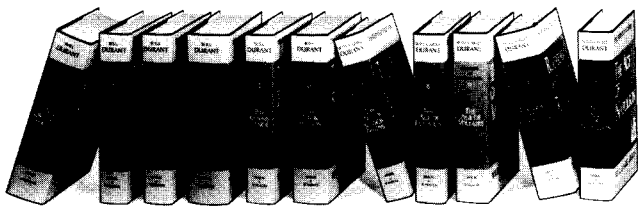
I enjoyed and concurred with "The Insufficiency of Honesty." As a priest (Episcopal), I have been asked several times by a penitent in the confessional for advice on whether to confess infidelity to a spouse. On each of the occasions the "injured" spouse was totally unaware of any unfaithfulness. And in each case I advised against telling for the same reason Stephen Carter speaks of in his article. I have added that for the penitent to keep silent might well be part of an appropriate penance.

Rev. Joseph W. Arps
Hampden, Maine

The Poetry Judge

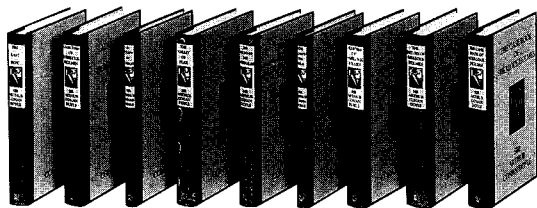
I found Garrison Keillor's "The Poetry Judge" (February *Atlantic*) very funny and mostly all too true. His lampooning of Vietnam poems, however, seems gratuitously unkind by the third time his narrator returns to the subject. I wonder if Keillor is aware that the poet and Vietnam veteran Michael Casey has won the Yale Younger Poets Award, the poet and

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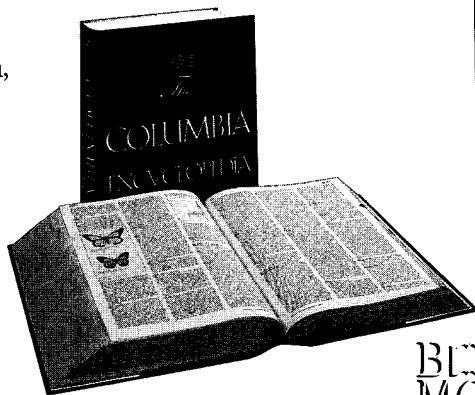


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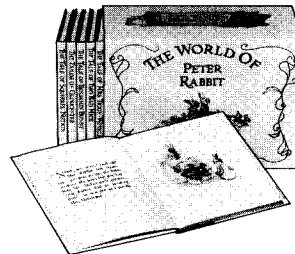
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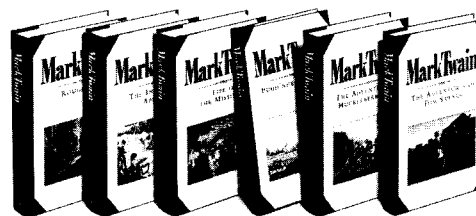
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Vietnam veteran Yusef Komunyakaa has won both the Kingsley Tufts Award and the Pulitzer Prize, the poet and Vietnam veteran Walter McDonald has won both the George Elliston Prize and the Juniper Prize, and the poet John Balaban, who spent three years in Vietnam as a civilian, has won both the Lamont Prize and a National Poetry Series award. None of these awards is named for a lady with three names. I would also direct Keillor's attention to the poetry of the Vietnam veterans Doug Anderson, Kevin Bowen, D. F. Brown, David Connolly, Horace Coleman, Gerald McCarthy, Basil Paquet, Dale Ritterbusch, and Bruce Weigl, each of whom has taken true-life experience and transformed it into literature.

W. D. Erhart
Philadelphia, Pa.

"The Poetry Judge" speaks the funny, crushing truth about ersatz poetry and wannabe poets. With apologies to Joyce Kilmer,

*I think that I shall never pen
a line of poetry again.*

Elizabeth Weber
Ames, Iowa

Garrison Keillor's poetry contest was our poetry contest—St. Paul's AAUW. We in our basic bliss were thrilled to have him, the famous Garrison Keillor, as one of our judges. So generous was he to refuse any remuneration. So sensitive was he to the significance of such an effort. He seemed to understand how much it meant to those inspired, pathetic protozoa who submitted their absurd elegies to their dead cats, their odes to Vietnam buddies "blown away yesterday," their lyrics on wedding receptions, their memories of Duluth, and assorted other laughable "painful truths."

I and my colleagues—who have also judged poetry contests and who have taught poetry and who have tried to put a good face and some jaunty encouragement on laughable lines penned by earnest "poets" who would like not to be killed before they are born—regret that Keillor's tauntings in his fine story will long reverberate painfully as professional judgment on what these would-be poets submitted.

Joy L. Davis
White Bear Lake, Minn.

Garrison Keillor replies:

There are in America marvelous poets doing brilliant and generous work, but my story is about the state of amateur poetry and about the thousands of creative-writing classes operated by kindly teachers who, like Joy Davis, encourage bad writing. Ms. Davis refers to these amateurs as "pathetic protozoa." I look on them as ambitious, intelligent persons who deserve better teaching. Writing requires discipline, and it can be taught, but you don't find it in turgid poems about Bad Daddies and The Struggle to Be Me and all the other flat, morbid, narcissistic writing that is encouraged by bad teaching. The creative-writing industry is cranking out reams of stuff that nobody in his or her right mind would ever want to read. One genre it mostly ignores is satire and humor. It takes discipline to tell a joke.

Man on Horseback

Richard Brookhiser may wish to review his listing of Presidents who saw or did not see action in military service in the article "A Man on Horseback" (January *Atlantic*).

James Buchanan was in the Army in the War of 1812. He took part in the defense of Baltimore and saw "the rockets' red glare, the bombs bursting in air."

Lyndon Johnson was in the Navy early in 1942 and made a famous bombing run when his plane was heavily attacked. It may not have been a battle, but it was certainly combat.

Brookhiser says that Gerald Ford did not see battle. He was on a Navy ship in the Pacific which was under air attack on many occasions. That should qualify.

Incidentally, two civilian Presidents were under enemy fire: James Madison, at Bladensburg in the War of 1812, and Abraham Lincoln, when he observed Confederate forces advancing on Washington, D.C., from the parapet of a fort. Shots were fired, and Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. is reputed to have shouted at Lincoln, "Get down, you damn fool!"

William E. Rooney
Baton Rouge, La.

I thoroughly enjoyed your article on George Washington and his character. However, you missed one important in-

fluence on his character formation: Christianity. Washington was raised in the Anglican Church and retained his membership there throughout his life. After his death twenty-four pages of handwritten prayers were found in Washington's papers. They express his deep belief in God and Christian principles. Washington's life reflected these beliefs. He wrote, "It is the duty of all Nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God, to obey his will, to be grateful for his benefits, and humbly to implore his protection and favor."

Doug Le Mahieu
Clinton, Wash.

Richard Brookhiser's article "A Man on Horseback" is extremely informative. However, Brookhiser lists the sixteen American Presidents who fought in battle and strikingly omits reference to Abraham Lincoln, who fought in the Black Hawk War in 1832, as an Illinois Militia captain.

Barry H. Garfinkel
New York, N. Y.

Richard Brookhiser replies:

I should have added Gerald Ford to my list of combatants. I might have added Lyndon Johnson, who actually won a combat decoration, but Robert Caro's description of how he earned it (by virtually staging a confrontation with the enemy in order to qualify) persuaded me to leave him off. The others served, but only by standing and waiting.

Washington was a lifelong Anglican-Episcopalian, served as a vestryman, and attended church fairly regularly, where his behavior was "serious and attentive," according to one minister who observed it. But he made few references to Jesus Christ in letters or speeches, he never took communion (Martha always did), and the prayers Doug Le Mahieu mentions are not in his handwriting.

Washington did have a powerful belief in Providence, repeatedly expressed in public and in private. If there was a moment that riveted it to his soul, it probably occurred in the French and Indian War. After surviving the destruction of General Edward Braddock's army in the wilderness, the twenty-three-year-old colonel wrote to a friend, "See the wondrous works of Providence! The uncertainty of human things!"

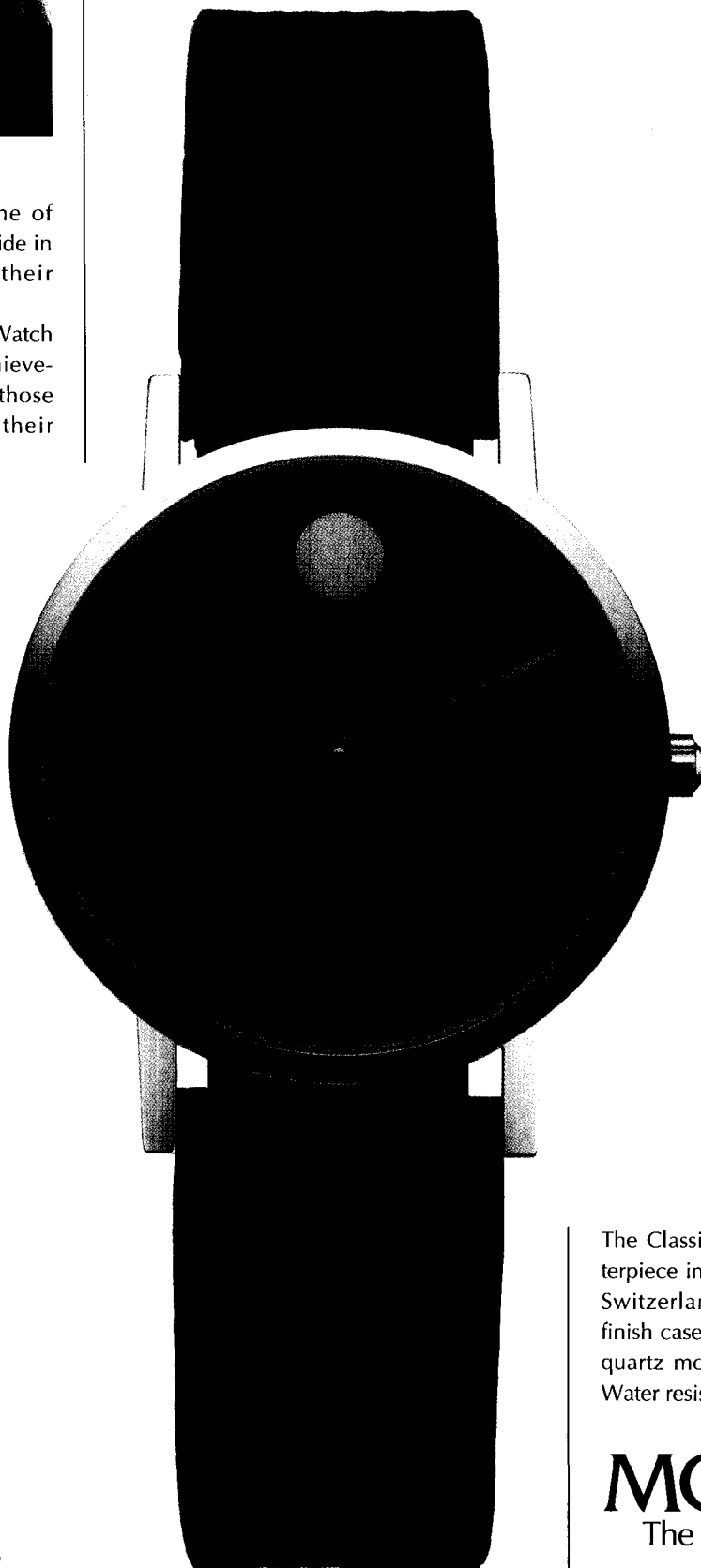


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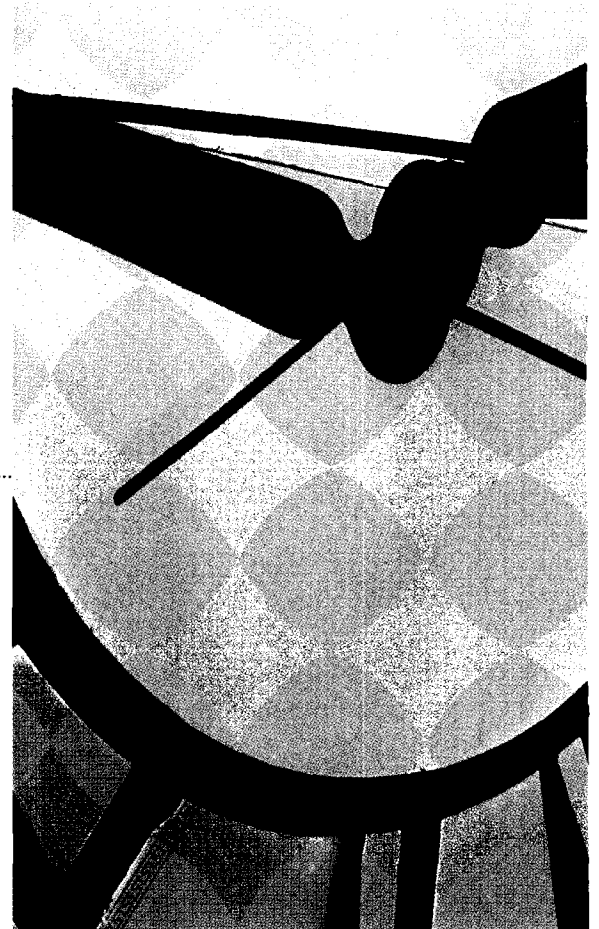
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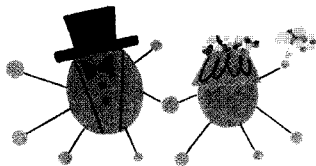
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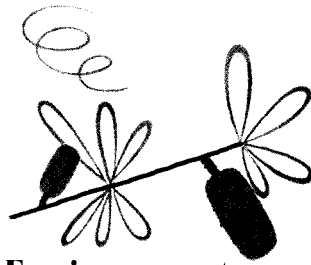
Government

Tax Freedom Day—the day by which the average American would have paid his tax bill for the year if all income initially went toward taxes—will almost certainly fall in May, as it has for the past 10 years. The precise date is not available as of this writing; however, according to the Tax Foundation, the research organization that calculates the date each year, this could be the latest Tax Freedom Day yet, because of the country's economic growth: higher incomes mean higher tax brackets. Tax Freedom Day has gradually slipped from January 31 (1902) to May 6 (1994 and 1995). Americans seeking consolation might consider that Canada, Germany, and France usually reach Tax Freedom Day in late June.



Health & Safety

Deer ticks become active this month; as a result, the risk of contracting tick-borne diseases rises. The most notorious of these is Lyme disease, which typically manifests itself as a rash and fever and may go on to cause chronic joint and muscle pain and neurological damage. However, doctors have identified two other tick-borne diseases, which produce symptoms similar to, but usually more severe than, those of Lyme disease. There have been some 100 cases of human granulocytic ehrlichiosis (HGE) and more than 400 of human monocytic ehrlichiosis (HME), with more than 10 fatalities, since the diseases were recognized, in 1993 and 1985. The overlap in symptoms among the three diseases can create treatment problems, because they do not all respond to the same antibiotics.

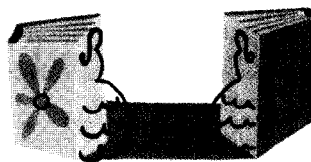


Environment

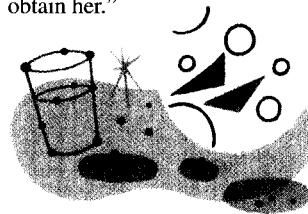
Fires will be burning this month in at least two of the nation's nature preserves: the Indian Boundary Prairies, in Illinois, and the Albany Pine Bush Preserve, in New York. The Nature Conservancy, a nonprofit organization that manages the tracts, will be setting the blazes in an effort to limit the risk of wildfires and to maintain healthy and diverse plant life. Prescribed burning—the setting of controlled fires—is not a new practice; however, it may be on the rise. Prompted in large part by the unusually severe wildfire season of 1994, the U.S. Forest Service is aiming to increase the area it burns—now some 350,000 acres annually—by 30 percent a year for the next three years. If it does (weather, among other things, could change its plans), it may run afoul of the Environmental Protection Agency, which is concerned that the resulting soot and smoke could violate the 1990 Clean Air Act.

Arts & Letters

May 1, The book publisher Scribner begins reaping the benefits of a 60-year-old option clause today, as *Lost Laysen*, the only other known work of fiction by Margaret Mitchell—who wrote *Gone With the Wind*—appears in bookstores across the country. *Lost Laysen*, a love story set in the South Pacific, was written in 1916, when Mitchell was 16 years old. It surfaced last year among the papers of one of her friends.



The Mitchell estate had planned to auction the work, but Scribner found that Mitchell's contract with Macmillan, Scribner's predecessor, gave the company an option on future books. Although Scribner has released only a few pages from the novel's preface in advance of publication, certain similarities to *Gone With the Wind* are apparent: the protagonists of *Lost Laysen*, a missionary woman and a ship's first mate, are "a strong-willed woman who places her honor above her life" and "a man who desires this woman with all his heart but who can never obtain her."

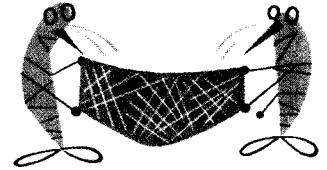


The Skies

May 3, Full Moon, also known this month as the Planting or Milk Moon. 5, Venus reaches its greatest brilliance for the year and its highest elevation in the sky for the rest of the century. Alert observers may spot it during daylight hours as well as during the early evening; late in the month it may even be possible to discern that it is crescent-shaped. 13, the waning Moon lies close to Saturn in the predawn sky.

Food

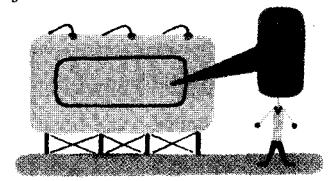
May 1, as of today no shrimp may be imported from nations that fail to use "turtle-safe" shrimping nets—those from which sea turtles can escape. The ban is the result of a ruling last December by a federal judge who found that the U.S. Commerce Department, among others, had not fully implemented a 1989 law that required countries that export shrimp to the United States to reduce accidental sea-turtle deaths. For the past six years the United States has applied the law only to those countries that fish in



the Caribbean and the western Atlantic. The comprehensive ban will affect 44 additional countries and imports of shrimp worth more than a billion dollars. Also this month the season for fiddleheads—the edible shoots of ostrich ferns—begins. Found in the Northeast and along the Canadian coast, fiddleheads have for centuries been eaten safely both cooked and raw. However, some recent outbreaks of gastrointestinal illness following the ingestion of al dente fiddleheads have led scientists to speculate that a new strain of the ferns may be mildly toxic, and the Centers for Disease Control now recommends that fiddleheads be boiled thoroughly for at least 20 minutes.

50 Years Ago

Jacques Barzun, writing in the May, 1946, issue of *The Atlantic Monthly*: "Advertisers have much to answer for. No doubt the world will soon forget, among worse atrocities, that a wartime invention was sold as a 'Black-out safety luminous gardenia,' but I wonder whether posterity will overlook the debased verbal instincts that allowed us to turn two admirable words—collaboration (which means working together) and appeasement (which means bringing peace into the heart)—into marks of opprobrium. We can blame the newspapers, but they act on prepared minds, and it is often a step upwards from billboard vulgarity to journalese."



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happens?

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this way?

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new doctor?

what if?

what if I hate claims forms?



what if?

what if?

what if?

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Backlogs of History

The past is a growing problem, and there's only going to be more of it

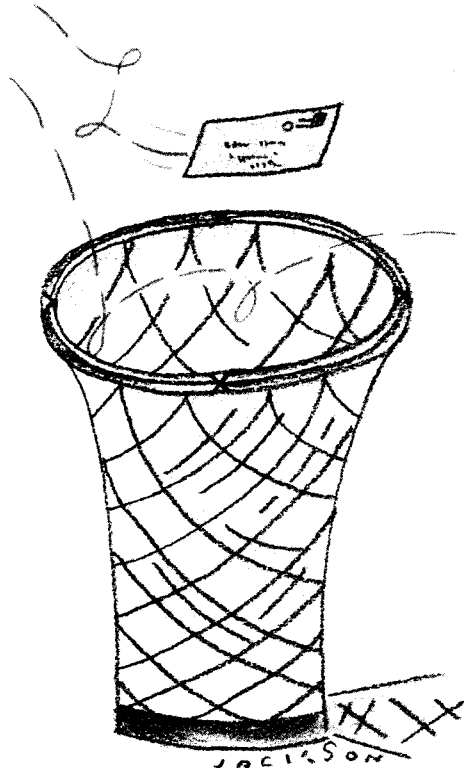
ONE morning a few years ago an envelope arrived from my parents containing the bill from New Rochelle Hospital for my delivery, in 1952. The contents of a basement or attic were being culled, and the bill had turned up in one of the many cardboard reliquaries that have long lent a kind of ballast to my childhood home. The hospital's total charge for a five-day stay, including drugs and phone calls, came to \$187.86. I was amazed at the cost, to be sure. But I was also struck by something else: that among all those decades' worth of family documents my parents had looked through, the delivery bill was the only thing they thought of sufficient interest to pass along.

This episode came to mind last fall when the U.S. National Archives and Records Administration announced its decision about whether, in addition to the vast numbers of government documents that it was already required to store, it would keep copies, paper or electronic, of all the government's E-mail. The decision came after years of debate among historians, public-interest groups, and government officials over a question that individual American households also ask themselves: How much stuff is worth saving? Opponents of E-mail storage argued that it would preserve at great expense a lot of useless clutter. Proponents noted that these days E-mail is sometimes the only "paper" trail that survives, and pointed to the role it played in the case of Oliver North and the Iran-contra arms-for-hostages deal.

Last fall the proponents won: the government's E-mail is now being saved.

■ ■ ■

At some point most of us realize that having a personal archival strategy is an inescapable aspect of modern life: one has to draw the line somewhere. What should the policy be toward children's drawings and report cards? Toward person-



al letters and canceled checks? Toward family photographs and wedding mementos? Toward favorite but no longer usable articles of clothing? People work out ad hoc answers to such questions, usually erring, I suspect, on the side of over-accrual. My father, who is an artist, still has all his art-school sketchbooks from when he was in his early teens, and he has some 10,000 Polaroid photographs of himself that he took over the years in order to capture details of lighting and drapery. He has a file of newspaper clippings about Fordham football games from the 1930s. Almost everyone seems to save—or "curate," as archaeologists say—

issues of *National Geographic*. That is why in garbage landfills copies of that magazine are rarely found in isolation; rather, they are found in herds, when an entire collection has been discarded after an owner has died or moved.

I happen to be an admirer of the archiving impulse and an inveterate archivist at the household level. Though not quite one of those people whom public-health authorities seem to run across every few years, with a house in which neatly bundled stacks of newspaper occupy all but narrow aisles, I do tend to save almost everything that is personal and familial, and even to supplement this private hoard with oddities of a more public nature—a calling card of Thomas Nast's, for instance, and a baseball bat of Luis Aparicio's, and Kim Philby's copy of *The Joy of Cooking*.

I cannot help wondering, though, whether as a nation we are compiling archives at a rate that will exceed anyone's ability ever to make sense of them. A number of observers have cited the problem of "information overload" as if it were a recent development, largely the consequence of computers. In truth, the archive backlog has been a problem for millennia. The excavation of thousands of cuneiform tablets in the ancient

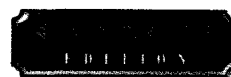
by Cullen Murphy



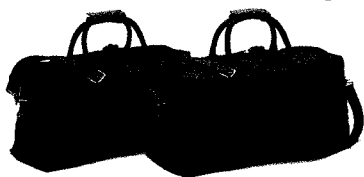
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archives of Ebla, in what is now Syria, was hugely important, but it will be many decades before the tablets are fully translated, and by then further discoveries will no doubt have dug scholars more deeply, as it were, into a hole. A few years ago a Vatican official spent a morning taking me through the rich labyrinths and frescoed recesses of the Vatican Library. "Do you even know what you have?" I asked at one point. He shrugged, and said that although the name of every item probably existed in the records somewhere—"Here, like this," he said, pulling out an eighteenth-century ledger and pointing to an entry in an elegant hand—he guessed that no one had actually opened up and looked at two thirds of the collection.

Writing's great advantage over memory has ever been that it allows one to "remember" what one can then forget about—an invitation to warehousing. The process keeps speeding up, and Roy Williams, a researcher at the California Institute of Technology's Center for Advanced Computing Research, has attempted to calculate how fast. He notes that the amount of information now stored in all printed sources everywhere in the world is roughly equivalent to 200 "petabytes," a petabyte being a quadrillion bytes. In contrast, Williams has calculated, the amount of information that will have accumulated in on-line media alone by the year 2000—that is, in the course of a mere couple of decades—is expected to be two and a half times as much as that, and he concedes that this figure may be a gross underestimation.

■ ■ ■

Historians obviously have problems when information is scarce, but it's not hard to see a very different problem emerging as source material becomes spectacularly overabundant. The great historian R. G. Collingwood addressed this issue in 1926 in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, pointing out why historians at the time approached ancient Greece differently from ancient Rome. For example, he wrote,

Greek history in the fifth century B.C. is a valuable study for the beginner in historical work because there are so few sources for it that the beginner can grasp them as a whole, and proceed to the work of interpreting them for himself. . . . When, on the other hand, he deals with Roman history of the early Empire, he is embarrassed by the immense mass of the available sources, especially those derived from epigraphy; here, therefore, he is confronted with the opposite problem, the problem of acquiring a sound scholarship or acquaintance with the sources, and the work of interpreting them falls comparatively into the background.

Imagine how much more daunting the work of interpretation becomes with the development of modern national bureaucracies and the national archives they have supplied. The historian Derek Beales, writing recently about the immense task facing any chronicler of the nearly sixty-eight-year reign of the Emperor Franz Josef of Austria-Hungary, observed, "What remains of the remorseless bureaucratic record is far too large for any one person to master." Leave aside the task of assessing an entire epoch and consider what is required in

purely physical terms to preserve even a single prominent person's lifetime documentary output. Benjamin Disraeli's correspondence survives down to the level of what today would be an E-mail message: "My darling, I shall be home for dinner at 1/2 pt 7. In haste, Your, Dis." Woodrow Wilson left so much behind that the historian Arthur S. Link spent his entire career at Princeton University annotating and publishing Wilson's personal papers, in sixty-nine volumes.

The National Archives in Washington now has about five billion documents in storage. Nationwide, federal repositories have another 19 million cubic feet of them, which in boxes set end to end would stretch from coast to coast. (Thirty years ago the boxes would have reached only from Washington to Wichita.) There are thousands of other data hoards, public and private, all around the country. Electronic storage, despite its incomparable vastness, may eventually make finding some specific things easier, if one knows what one is looking for, and the Library of Congress and the National Archives have ambitious projects under way. But electronic storage also has some major drawbacks, such as the fact that deterioration and technological obsolescence will require that all electronic data be copied onto new systems every ten years. In any event, the cadre of people available to look into all this material is not getting much larger. The number of professors of American history, for instance, has been relatively constant for years. (There are currently about 6,000.)

Is it preposterous to begin thinking of some of our archives as the new tels? Tels are the mounds that layer upon layer of former cities make; they are everywhere in the Middle East, harboring the archaeological record of thousands of years of human history. But there are too many of them for more than a few ever to be excavated systematically, and understanding what's in even those few takes decades if not centuries. For the rest, the occasional exploratory shaft or trench must suffice. I thought of those shafts and trenches recently when a historian friend mentioned that some of his colleagues, confronted with too great a bulk of sources, resign themselves to "sampling," and others increasingly narrow the focus of their academic inquiries until they find something manageable.

Don't get me wrong: I am not proposing that we discard anything at all. One rarely knows in advance what will turn out to be of interest or importance and what should have gone directly into the oubliette. It is always delightful when something is discovered unexpectedly, as the biblical city Urkesh of the Horites was just a few months ago (inside a tel). But information does have its natural predators, and it may be that sometimes natural processes work out for the best.

A professor of mine once said that the only thing enabling him to complete his study of medieval France was that so many of the records he would otherwise have had to look at were destroyed during the Wars of Religion and the French Revolution. I called him up recently to ask if I remembered his remark correctly. He said yes, I did. And he recalled with particular gratitude a certain bonfire in Carcassonne. ☛

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Blowback

*The CIA poured billions into a jihad
against Soviet-occupied Afghanistan, creating
a militant Islamist Abraham Lincoln
Brigade believed to have been involved in bombings
from Islamabad to New York.
Is Bosnia next?*

ONE Friday evening, just after sunset prayers, Sheikh Omar Abdul-Rahman climbed into a camouflaged truck in Peshawar, Pakistan, and set off for his first trip inside Afghanistan. It was 1985, he told me later, and he had just spent three years in Egyptian prisons, where he had been severely tortured as he awaited trial on charges of issuing a *fatwa* resulting in

the assassination of President Anwar Sadat; a military court later acquitted him of that, and of a related conspiracy charge. (Last January in New York the sheikh was sentenced to life imprisonment for seditious conspiracy to wage a "war of urban terrorism against the United States.") As he settled into the back seat of the U.S.-supplied truck, the sheikh, who was then forty-

seven and had been blind since infancy, was helped into a flak jacket by the fundamentalist Afghan resistance leader Gulbaddin Hekmatyar.

At that time the Soviet Union was occupying Afghanistan, and the United States was supporting the Afghan resistance; Hekmatyar, though he was one of the most stridently anti-Western of the resistance leaders, was receiving roughly half the arms that the CIA was supplying. The sheikh had first met Hekmatyar in Saudi Arabia a number of years before, and they were friends. They had much in common: both were exceedingly charismatic religious populists; both had committed their lives to jihad, or Islamic holy war; both were fiery orators. They were both given to elliptical, colorful turns of phrase, and their shared message was clear: the imperative to overthrow a secular government—whether in Afghanistan or Egypt—and establish an Islamic state.

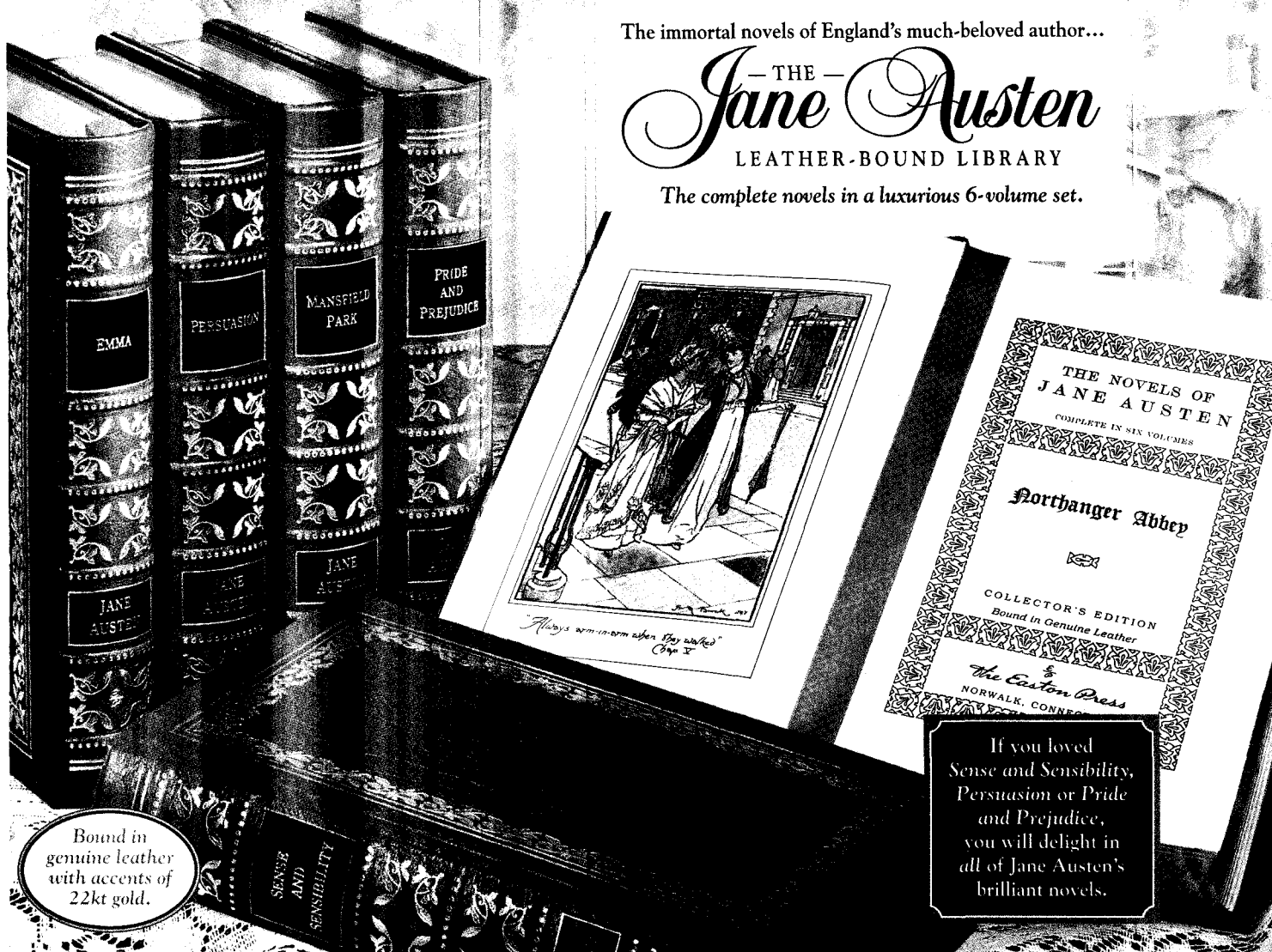
Outside Peshawar the mountain passes came alive with men. The *mujahideen* were loading their caravans with AK-

by Mary Anne Weaver

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47s, mortars, grenades, and mines to return to Afghanistan. Mules and ponies strained under the weight of wooden crates strapped onto their backs. There were no identifying markings on the crates, nor were there any on the contents, but everything was part of what would become Washington's largest covert-action program since Vietnam—equipping fighters on the last battlefield of the Cold War. The truck in which Sheikh Omar was traveling joined a convoy of six or seven others and continued toward the Khyber Pass.

The *mujahideen* preferred to move the arms supplied by the CIA on moonless nights, Nawab Salim, one of Hekmatyar's aides, explained later when he recounted the trip to me. Salim accompanied the sheikh and Hekmatyar into Afghanistan that night; so did Muhammad Shawqi Islambouli, an Egyptian who was fighting in the war, and who was the elder brother of Lieutenant Khalid Islambouli, the assassin of Anwar Sadat. The sun was just beginning to rise when the convoy reached its destination, a battlefield headquarters in the province of Jalalabad, some fifty miles northeast of the Afghan capital, Kabul. Everything there seemed to be highly improvised, and the headquarters consisted merely of a string of battered and pockmarked buildings built into the side of a strategic hill.

For nearly two decades Sheikh Omar had preached his message of jihad throughout the Middle East. Now he was inside Afghanistan, where a jihad was actually taking place. "My strongest emotion was pride," he told me afterward. "I felt so proud of my religion, so proud of the power that Muslims had. And I knew that Allah would aid these people and this religion, and that Islam would be victorious in the end."

Guided by Hekmatyar and Islambouli, the sheikh walked to a sandbagged position on the crest of the hill. From below, in the valley, came the echo of crashing artillery shells. He stood there for perhaps five minutes. "He was weeping," Nawab Salim recalled. After a few moments Sheikh Omar turned toward Hekmatyar. "I have never asked Allah for anything," he said. "But I am under a great disadvantage now. If only Allah could give me eyes for a couple of years, or for a couple of hours, so I could fight in the jihad!"

LAST December 21, in a crowded market in Peshawar, the rugged Pakistani frontier town that had been the primary staging area for the jihad in Afghanistan, a car bomb exploded, killing thirty-six people and wounding about 120 more. Only a month earlier two similar car bombs—one outside the Riyadh headquarters of a U.S. military training center for the Saudi National Guard, the other outside the Egyptian embassy in the Pakistani capital of Islamabad—killed twenty-four people, including five Americans. The attack in Saudi Arabia was almost certainly aimed at the Saudi dynasty as well as at the United States. As for the car bombings in Pakistan, they followed threats from three militant Egyptian Islamist groups who demanded that the government of Pakistan stop extraditing those of their members—all of them veterans of the jihad—who had stayed on when the war came to an end and were using Peshawar as a base. The groups also demanded that the government of the United States, for its part, release Sheikh Omar.

One of the groups that claimed credit for the bombing in Saudi Arabia—and one that has warned that there will be further attacks—had participated in the jihad in Afghanistan, as had all three of the groups believed to have been involved in the November bombing in Islamabad. The sheikh and the CIA (and Saudi Arabia) had been obsessed with driving out the Soviets. As a result the CIA helped to train and fund what eventually became an international network of highly disciplined and effective Islamic militants—and a new breed of terrorist as well.

Speaking of the bombings, a former U.S. diplomat specializing in Saudi Arabia told me recently, "Whether the attacks were carried out by the same or allied Islamic militant groups is not the most important thing. What is far more troubling is that these attacks illustrate the changing nature of terrorism since the Cold War. There's been a marked decline in the fairly well funded, ideologically organized groups like the Red Brigades. More and more we're seeing a proliferation of amorphous underground Islamic groups that we've never heard of before." He added that larger numbers of people are prone to enter the new-style groups. "That, to me, is highly worrisome. Their operations are easy to do. They're basi-

cally low-tech. Sure, a certain amount of training is required—and then you go to a feedstore and to a Radio Shack. The common element in all these attacks—whether in Cairo or Riyadh, Islamabad or Algiers, Europe or New York—is today's equivalent of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade: the 'Afghan Arabs,' the veterans of the Afghanistan war."

SIXTEEN years have passed since the CIA began providing weapons and funds—eventually totaling more than \$3 billion—to a fratricidal alliance of seven Afghan resistance groups, none of whose leaders are by nature democratic, and all of which are fundamentalist in religion to some extent, autocratic in politics, and venomously anti-American. Washington's financial commitment to the jihad was exceeded only by Saudi Arabia's. At the time the jihad was getting under way, there was no significant Islamist opposition movement in Saudi Arabia, and it apparently never occurred to the Saudi rulers, who feared the Soviets as much as Washington did, that the volunteers it sent might be converted by the jihad's ideology. Therein lies the greatest paradox of the bombing in Riyadh: it and the explosions in Peshawar and Islamabad could well prove to be part of the negative fallout—or "blowback," in intelligence parlance—of the U.S.- and Saudi-orchestrated Afghan jihad.

The bombings—the first such terrorist attack in Saudi history, and among the worst in Pakistan's—were the clearest warnings yet of an ominous escalation in the conflicts between the governments in Cairo and Riyadh and their Islamist foes. And the carnage in Islamabad—the fourth attack against the Egyptian government abroad in recent months (Mubarak narrowly survived an assassination attempt in Addis Ababa)—indicated that Egypt's militant Islamic groups, facing an increasingly vengeful crackdown at home, were transferring their four-year-old war to the international front. U.S. policymakers were stunned. In less than a week the vulnerabilities of three of Washington's pivotal regional allies had become clear.

Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Pakistan had all served U.S. interests during the jihad in Afghanistan; none appears able to cope with its aftermath. Mubarak's anger was palpable when he told me, months

before the bombings, that he laid the blame for Islamist terrorism squarely on Pakistan, for, in his words, failing to “clean up” Peshawar and its environs. Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto’s bewilderment after the bombings was evident, as she once again faulted the United States and the CIA, which she accused of continuing to finance Pakistan’s radical Muslim clerics and fundamentalist groups. As for the rulers of Saudi Arabia, whose princes and foundations, ironically, remain the leading benefactors of many of the militant Islamic groups in a shortsighted attempt to placate the kingdom’s expanding fundamentalist constituency, they seemed shaken out of their placidity. And government officials in all three capitals began to wonder, as they redoubled their efforts against terrorism, whether the Islamists could still be contained.

For more than a decade some 25,000 Islamic militants, from nearly thirty countries around the world, had streamed through Peshawar on their way to the jihad. They came, without passports and without names, from the Palestinian organization Hamas, from Egypt’s Al-Gama’a al-Islamiya and Al-Jihad, from Algeria’s Islamic Salvation Front, and from the Philippines’ Moro Liberation Front. Five years after the jihad ended, a thousand or so remained, some in Peshawar itself, others encamped in the mountain passes of the ungovernable tribal areas bordering Afghanistan, planning and executing what investigators now believe were terrorist acts that have reached from Cairo to Algiers, Manila to Bangkok—and to the streets of Islamabad, Riyadh, Peshawar, and New York.

“Even today you can sit at the Khyber Pass and see every color, every creed, every nationality, pass,” a Western diplomat told me in Peshawar last spring. “These groups, in their wildest imagination, never would have met if there had been no jihad. For a Moro to get a Stinger missile! To make contacts with Islamists from North Africa! The United States created a Moscow Central in Peshawar for these groups, and the consequences for all of us are astronomical.”

The diplomat went on to say that many veterans of the Afghan jihad have set up an informal network of small, loosely organized underground cells, with support centers scattered around

the world: in the United States, the Persian Gulf countries, Germany, Switzerland, Scandinavia, Sudan, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. The days of mule trains like the one Sheikh Omar joined en route to Afghanistan are long gone; now E-mail and faxes drive the jihad.

PEOPLE in the Peshawar bazaars and in the overcrowded refugee camps still remember Sheikh Omar from the war years. A short, rotund man, dressed in long gray clerical robes and a red fezlike cap with a wide white band, he was easily distinguishable by his blindness and by his full gray-white beard, which rested on his chest. It was in Peshawar that Sheikh Omar became involved with the U.S. and Pakistani intelligence officials who were orchestrating the war. The sixty or so CIA and Special Forces officers based there considered him a “valuable asset,” according to one of them, and overlooked his anti-Western message and incitement to holy war because they wanted him to help unify the *mujahideen* groups.

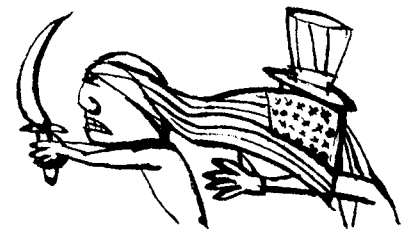
Unifying the groups, which had been fighting among themselves for years, proved impossible even for Sheikh Omar, but he did succeed in coordinating some of their activities. As he did so, he favored the two most anti-Western and fundamentalist of them—one led by Gulbaddin Hekmatyar, the other by Professor Abdurrah Rasul Sayyaf, who, like the sheikh, held a Ph.D. from the University of al-Azhar, in Cairo. A swash-buckling figure, often draped in blankets of homespun cloth, Sayyaf had taught at Kabul University, but his power base inside Afghanistan was limited. Nevertheless, largely because he was an adherent of the puritanical Wahhabi school of Islam (the dominant school in Saudi Arabia), Riyadh funded him lavishly.

But Sheikh Omar’s closest friend in Peshawar was a highly respected Palestinian, Sheikh Abdullah Azzam, a man of erudition, refinement, and eloquence, who also had a Ph.D. from Al-Azhar but was everything the blustering Sayyaf was not. Like Sheikh Omar, he had been a professor of *shari’a* law (at the University of Jordan) before joining the jihad. Azzam became the pivotal figure in the Arab world in popularizing the cause. What was called the Service Office, which he led until November of

1989, when he was killed by a still-unidentified assassin, was the largest recruitment center in Peshawar, perhaps in the world, for Arab volunteers. It became, in a sense, the nexus for the pan-Islamic effort both inside and—after the Soviet occupation ended, in 1989—outside Afghanistan.

Money flowed into the Service Office from the Muslim Brotherhood, to which Sheikh Azzam belonged. But the heaviest funding, which may have totaled hundreds of millions of dollars, came from

*The CIA helped to
train and fund what
became an international
network of Islamic
militants—and a new
breed of terrorist*



Saudi Arabia—some directly from the Saudi government, some from official mosques, and some from Saudi princes and members of the kingdom’s financial and business elite. Prince Salman bin Abdul Aziz, the governor of Riyadh, who headed a support committee that funded the Arab *mujahideen*, was a heavy contributor, as was the Grand Mufti, Sheikh Abdul Aziz bin Baz, who chairs the immensely powerful Muslim World League, the main conduit for Saudi government funds to Islamic causes worldwide. As was and is true of much of Saudi Arabia’s clandestine funding abroad, the league’s funds were often distributed somewhat indiscriminately. The Service Office set up branches in Europe and the United States as the war progressed. East Coast efforts in the United States centered on the Alkifah Refugee Center, on Brooklyn’s Atlantic Avenue. More than

200 Arabs and Arab-Americans were recruited and sent to the jihad.

As Sheikh Azzam recruited, Sheikh Omar preached. Generally flying first-class, he carried his message of jihad from Pakistani refugee camps to the towns of upper Egypt, into Saudi Arabian mosques, and to Islamic centers in Germany, England, Turkey, and the United States. During his travels, over nearly five years, Sheikh Omar's stature continued to grow, as he shored up old friendships and made new ones along the way. He always kept in mind his ultimate goal: the establishment in Egypt of an Islamic state. Planning ahead, he cultivated men whose assistance would eventually lead to the formation of an international support network for his activities—an axis that would link Europe and the United States with Sudan, Pakistan, and Afghanistan.

The sheikh met frequently during those years, in London and Khartoum, with Hassan al-Turabi, the erudite Islamist who today effectively controls the rigid Islamic government in Sudan (whence U.S. diplomats were withdrawn in February because of fears of terrorist attacks). He wooed Pakistani generals, many of whom were, and are, committed Islamists, and all of whom were charmed by Sheikh Omar's extraordinary knowledge of the Koran. And he returned to Saudi Arabia, where he had previously lived, there proving adept at exploiting political divisions within the ruling establishment.

Two of his most abiding friendships, however, turned out to be with his traveling companions on that 1985 trip. Gulbaddin Hekmatyar was named Prime Minister of Afghanistan in 1992, when the puppet Communist government in Kabul finally fell. The fighting continued, now in the form of a fratricidal civil war in which Hekmatyar unleashed a deadly offensive against other factions of the *mujahideen*, using a formidable arsenal of arms—all of them supplied by the United States and Saudi Arabia. (Ironically, Hekmatyar and the present leaders of the Afghan government, who among them have stockpiled some 500 "missing" Stinger anti-aircraft missiles supplied by the CIA, are now being challenged by a new and extremely fundamentalist Afghan student militia known as the Taliban, which grew out of

the chaos left by the CIA's war. With the strong backing of Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, it has managed to wrest control of nearly half of the country—and several Stingers—from the leaders of the jihad.)

Muhammad Islambouli, who at one time was a student of Sheikh Omar's at the Upper Egyptian University of Asyut, has since that trip in 1985 become a leading figure in Egypt's militant Islamic Group, or Al-Gama'a al-Islamiya, the first organization to claim responsibility for the Islamabad bomb. The group's spiritual mentor is Sheikh Omar. Like hundreds of other Egyptians who fought in the jihad, Islambouli now divides his time among Europe and Peshawar and the battlefields of Afghanistan, all of which serve as organizational centers or training grounds for Egypt's militant Islamic groups.

WHEN Sheikh Omar entered the United States, in July of 1990, via Saudi Arabia, Peshawar, and Sudan on a much-disputed tourist visa issued by an undercover agent of the CIA, his primary purpose was to set up a U.S. infrastructure, a funding mechanism, and an organizational base for Egypt's militant Islamic groups—an undertaking that he had largely accomplished by the time of his arrest in 1993.

Many of his followers remained in Peshawar, however, and continued their work. Some teamed up with other militant Islamist groups, including a cadre of demolitions and weapons experts from the Saudi Islamic Movement for Change, which claimed responsibility for the Riyadh car bomb. Others were instructors or trainees in the dozen or so military training camps that hugged the Pakistani-Afghan border on both sides. Still others went off in search of new jihads, in Tajikistan or Kashmir, or joined some 3,000 veterans of the jihad who went as volunteers to Bosnia, where, easily distinguishable by their dark beards, they fought alongside the predominantly Muslim Bosnian army for two years. Last October the Afghan veterans vowed to kill five British soldiers in the United Nations force in retaliation for the death of a Bosnian fundamentalist who had pointed a gun at a British soldier and was shot by him. They are also suspected of having murdered an American employee of the UN. Now there is concern that the

jihad veterans will engage in terrorist acts against U.S. troops—a concern that turned to alarm in February, when militant Islamist groups vowed to strike back at U.S. targets in retaliation for the sentencing of Sheikh Omar.

AS they sifted through the rubble of the former Egyptian embassy in Islamabad, investigators, including agents from the FBI (which also has agents in Riyadh), attempted to determine what, if any, links exist between the two attacks, each of which involved more than a thousand pounds of ammonium nitrate and fuel oil—the same highly combustible mixture used in the World Trade Center bombing in New York.

"The bomb in Riyadh is of far greater interest to me," the former U.S. diplomat specializing in Saudi Arabia told me. "The one in Islamabad was more comprehensible, and highly predictable. Riyadh was not. Never before has the Saudi Islamic opposition been so emboldened. In a sense they ripped off the veil."

About a thousand Saudis had fought in the jihad. Largely funded and supported by their government, they came from good and wealthy families. I asked the diplomat what, in his view, made the Saudis different from other Islamists who came to the jihad.

"Their government sent them," he responded. "It was the patriotic thing to do. But when these guys got there, they met others and began to network; they found a whole new world out there. And despite their wealth, they were underemployed, frustrated, an accident waiting to happen—and it did. Also, unlike the others who went to Afghanistan as members of Islamic groups—Gama'a, Al-Jihad, Hamas, and the like—there were no organized Saudi groups. That's what makes these guys very different: *they* set up the networks when they came home."

Other U.S. officials agree, and warn that despite the Saudi government's efforts to blame the usual regional suspects—Iran, Iraq, and Sudan—for the car bombing, the Islamist discontent in Saudi Arabia is real, and the movement is basically homegrown.

One of its most charismatic and powerful champions is Osama bin Laden, the billionaire scion of a leading Saudi fam-

(Continued on page 36)



Arts & ENTERTAINMENT PREVIEW

Jazz

A Miles Davis
and Gil Evans
Collection

Pop

Sixties Rage
From a
Nineties
Band

Dance

Tharp, Robbins,
and Balanchine in
the Spotlight

Theater

Comédie-
Française
Returns to
Brooklyn

Film

The Silver
Screen on the
High Seas

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Popular Music and Jazz

BY BOB BLUMENTHAL AND CHARLES M. YOUNG

A JOINT VENTURE FROM THE GOLDEN AGE

The trumpeter Miles Davis and the arranger Gil Evans had the most probing and poetic partnership in jazz history. From their 1947 meeting until Evans's death, in 1988, the pair shared a fascination with harmonic motion, rhythmic variety, the weight of sound, and the kinetics of silence. While the influence of Evans on such diverse Davis small-group classics as "Round Midnight" and "Filles de Kilimanjaro" often went uncredited, his contribution was front and center in the late 1950s and early 1960s, resulting in three of the supreme recorded efforts of the twentieth century, which are now collected and expanded on *Miles Davis & Gil Evans: The Complete Columbia Studio Recordings* (six Columbia CDs, nine Mosaic LPs, appearing in mid-May).

Columbia paired Davis and Evans on the strength of their early success with the Davis Nonet, yet could hardly have expected that a larger ensemble would prove so inspirational. The two seized the opportunity to display their emotional compatibility, expressing feelings from tenderness to agony with total honesty and a most modern edge, while simultaneously pressing against accepted definitions of fitting jazz material. If the trumpeter had the tonal presence to sustain interest over an entire album, the writer matched it with expansive concepts that linked discrete pieces into larger unified statements.

Three of their efforts produced outright masterpieces. *Miles Ahead* (1957) blended pop ballads and material from friends Ahmad Jamal, Dave Brubeck, and J. J. Johnson into a

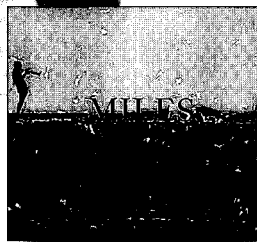
continuous suite, with Davis playing at his most heartfelt (primarily on the richer-sounding flugelhorn) while the band constantly foreshadowed and reintegrated the material. For *Porgy and Bess* (1958) Evans reordered the Gershwin score, mixing lyrical rambles with bold street cries and angst-ridden ensemble blasts that turned an opera for several players into an instrumental soliloquy that was ahead of its time. *Sketches of Spain* (1959–1960) was even bolder, pairing classical compositions with open-ended originals based on Spanish folk tunes. Both Davis and Evans reached a creative peak in their reimagining of the adagio movement from Rodrigo's *Concierto de Aranjuez*. An attempt to ride the bossa nova bandwagon led to *Quiet Nights* (1962–1963), a fragmented and incomplete yet occasionally pungent finale to their peak period.

There are several good reasons to acquire the new boxed set as opposed to the separate albums. Sonic shortcomings, which have dogged the originals since *Miles Ahead* was first released in reprocessed stereo, have been overcome by the newly mastered discs and audiophile vinyl (the latter available by mail order from Mosaic at 35 Melrose Place, Stamford, Connecticut 06902). Odd projects, such as recordings from Davis's 1962 piano-less septet and the previously unreleased score for the 1963 play *The Time of the Barracudas*, are included. Alternate takes and excerpts from rehearsals find Davis and Evans fine-tuning their creations. And *Miles Ahead*, *Porgy and Bess*, and *Sketches of Spain* belong together, the shared pinnacle of two jazz giants.

—B.B.



Working on *Quiet Nights*



An original release

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NOT A BAND TO BRING HOME TO YOUR PARENTS



One of the most uncompromising and politically radical bands ever to appear on a major label, Rage Against the Machine has sold more than three million copies of its eponymous debut album, released in 1992. Receiving little radio play, the band achieved notoriety for protesting censorship and for publicizing the plight of the imprisoned American Indian Movement leader Leonard Peltier with their video "Freedom" on MTV. The album cover alone—a photo of a Buddhist priest burning himself to death to protest the Vietnam War—probably cost the band

a few million in sales. After many rumors of its breakup, Rage has finally returned with its second album, *Evil Empire* (Epic), which picks up where the first one left off. The singer-lyricist Zack de la Rocha continues his obsession with history, declaring it a "flowery cancerous mess" and demanding that it be "broken, bloody and undressed." He undresses it by naming names in politics and the Pentagon ("that five sided Fist-agon"), demanding justice for the oppressed, and reminding everyone that the same forces that brought us Vietnam ("Vietnow," he calls it) remain in place.

The guitarist Tom Morello, one of the few Harvard graduates to become a serious contender in rock-and-roll, has the musical imagination and ferocious energy to match De la Rocha's declamations, and the rhythm section of Tim Bob on bass and Brad Wilk on drums manages the difficult balance between heavy and tight as well as anyone on the planet. Watch for their tour. It'll remind you of 1968.

—C.M.Y.



Bob Blumenthal is a jazz critic for The Boston Globe. Charles M. Young reviews popular music for Playboy, Musician, and other publications.

Film

BY ELLA TAYLOR

IT'S A TOUGH JOB, BUT SOMEBODY'S GOT TO DO IT

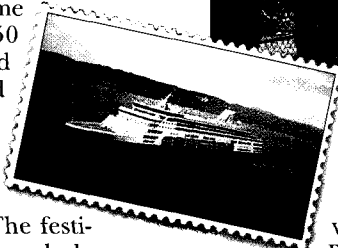
It's grand to have a job that pays me to see movies and go to film festivals, grander still when one of those festivals takes place on a cruise in the Caribbean. Organized every other year by Dusty Cohl, the founder of the Toronto Film Festival, the Floating Film Festival this time brought together 150 movie buffs, critics, and programmers aboard the fancy MS *Ryndam* for a series of mostly independent films interspersed with island-hopping excursions. The festival had its share of crowd-pleasers—Marleen Gorris's *Antonia's Line* won the audience award, with Jon Blair's fine documentary *Anne Frank Remembered* and Tim Reid's worthy but conventional *Once Upon a Time... When We Were Coloured* running close behind. *Time* magazine critic Richard Corliss presented the delightfully sophomoric *Mystery Science Theater 3000: The Movie* (opening in late April), about a man and two robots marooned in space who are forced by a mad scientist to watch old B-movies—in this case the hilariously awful 1955 sci-fi classic *This Island Earth*.

Corliss, an Asian-film specialist, presented two Hong Kong films already in commercial release—Wong Kar-Wai's superlative romantic comedy *Chungking Express*, and *Rumble in the Bronx*, a delirious action vehicle for Jackie Chan, directed by Stanley Tong—along with Chinese director Jiang Wen's ("as in John Wayne") enthralling *In the Heat of the Sun*, about teenagers cruising Beijing during the Cultural Revolution. Similar in theme, though less impressive conceptually, was the beautifully shot but assaulting *Cyclo* (coming this August), by the Vietnamese director Tranh Anh Hung (*The Scent of Green Papaya*), about rickshaw bicyclists on the violent streets of Ho Chi Minh City.

Aside from a karaoke evening (no, I didn't) and a Robbie Burns Night, in which otherwise sane men showed up



Cabbies from *Driven* (top)
The MS *Ryndam* (left)



for dinner in skirts, one of the most enjoyable events was a chat between critic Roger Ebert and writer Donald E. Westlake. Westlake discoursed with charm and wry wit about his work and about the making of *The Grifters*, for which he wrote the screenplay—and made my day by describing the movie *Seven* as "loathsome."

For me the highlight of the festival was a modest first feature with (as yet) no distributor. Written and directed with astonishing assurance by Michael Shoob, and presented by former *New York Daily News* critic Kathleen Carroll, *Driven* tells the stories of three Los Angeles cabbies who work for a two-bit taxi company. The film is a small miracle of good writing coupled with superlative ensemble performances from Tony Todd, Daniel Roebuck, Whip Hubley, and Chad Lowe. Distributors, step right up.



Mystery Science Theater

OF FLAPPERS AND FARM HANDS

Director John Schlesinger (*Midnight Cowboy*) has mobilized the wicked pen of British novelist Malcolm Bradbury (*The History Man*) to adapt *Cold Comfort Farm*, Stella Gibbons's darkly funny 1932 novel of English village life. No rural



A city girl takes on the country

A SURVIVOR'S STORY

During and after the Second World War thousands of mostly orphaned Jewish teenagers were brought from Nazi-occupied countries to Israel to live in youth villages—many run by kibbutzim—alongside troubled Israeli youths. Eli Cohen's *Under the Domim Tree* is a tribute to the operation, known as Youth Aliyah. Adapted from an autobiographical book by one of Israel's finest actresses, Gila Almagor, the film is a sequel to her well-received 1988 collaboration with Cohen, *The Summer of Aviya*. Directed with tact and sensitivity,



The children of Youth Aliyah

Under the Domim Tree explores the terrors and triumphs of a group of Polish-Jewish teenagers as they struggle with their memories, their night sweats, and their longing for families that in all too many cases have disappeared without a trace. What the movie lacks in sophistication is more than made up for by heartfelt sympathy and an imaginative flair for dramatizing inner turmoil.

nostalgia here. Kate Beckinsale stars as Flora Poste, a pert, compulsively tidy London flapper who, after being orphaned, descends on a pack of glum country relatives intending to write a novel, and ends by shaking up everyone's life, including her own. Shrewdly observed, with Schlesinger's sardonic flair and an edge of broad comedy, the movie boasts a stellar cast, featuring Joanna (Abfab) Lumley as Flora's bracing friend, Ian McKellen as her fire-and-brimstone preacher cousin, Eileen Atkins as his sad-sack wife, and Rufus Sewell (*Carrington*) as their hunky son. There's an improbably happy but oddly satisfying ending.

Ella Taylor is a film critic for LA Weekly.

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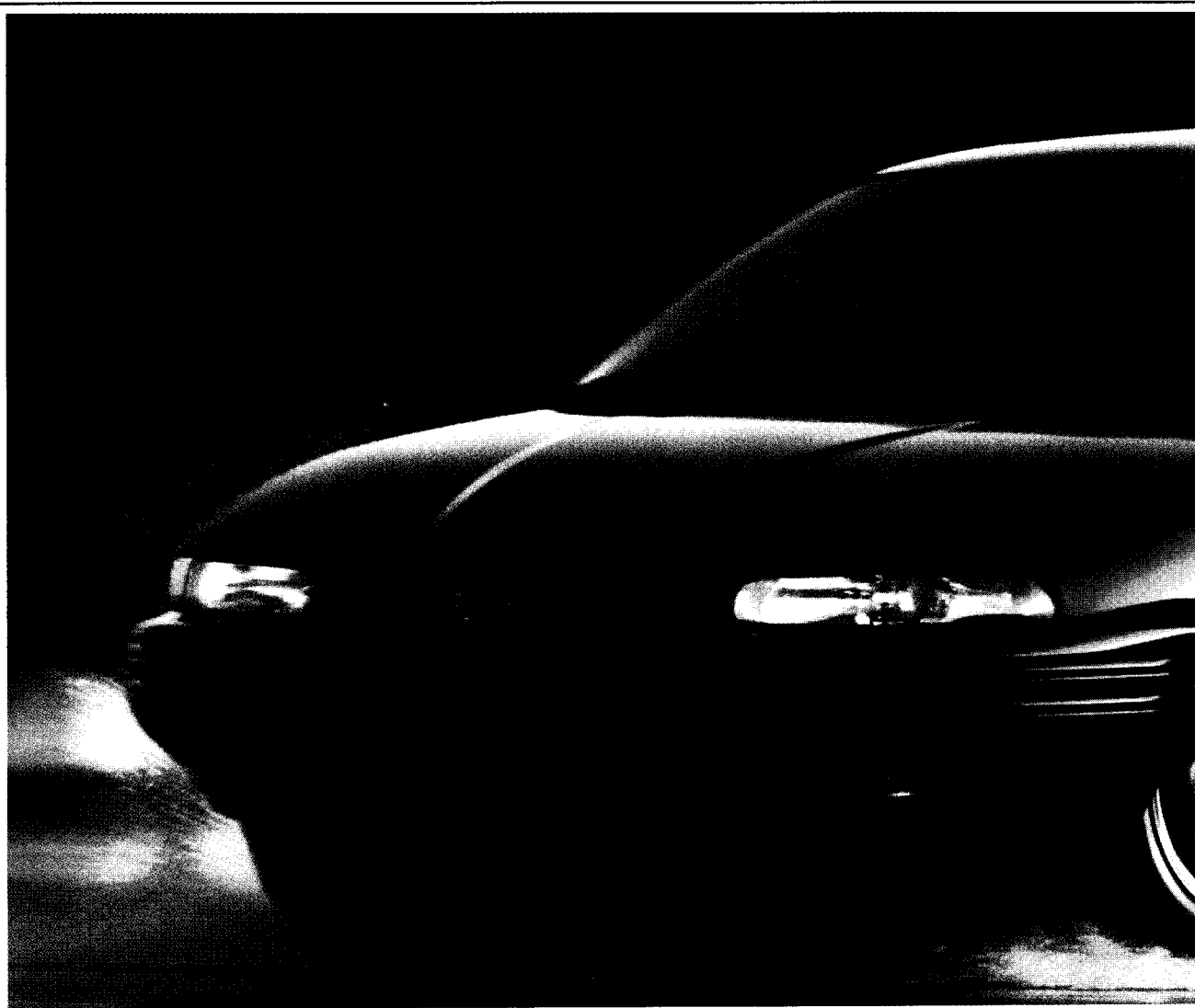
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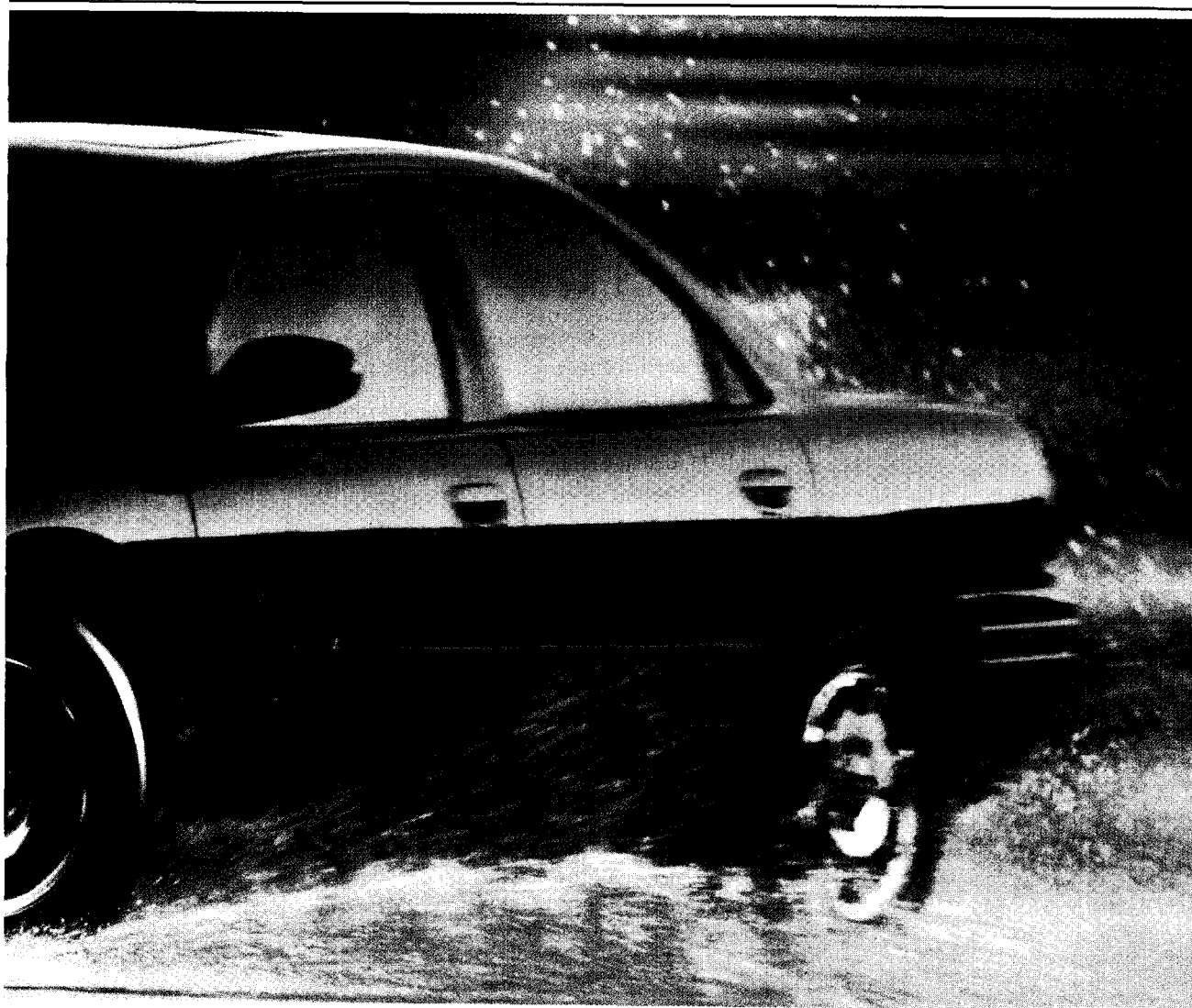
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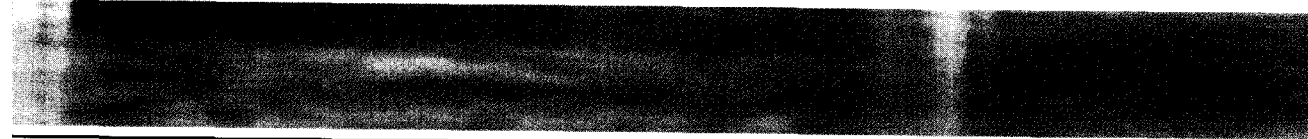
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Dance and Theater

BY AUSTIN BAER AND NANCY DALVA

IN THE BALLET WARS THE AUDIENCE WINS

This month the American Ballet Theatre and the New York City Ballet both come to Lincoln Center, launching two months of ballet wars. Where to go and what to see? Some nights, if you stand on the plaza between the Metropolitan Opera House (the ABT's stage) and the New York State Theater (the NYCB's) at just the right moment, you will be able to see diehard balletomanes and frazzled dance critics sprint past, switching theaters at intermission—a premiere here, a debut there. My advice is to stay in your seat and take in what the companies call an all-choreographer evening. Ballet companies frequently stage the evening-length classics that fill box-office coffers; these programs, which present several numbers by a single choreographer, are something rarer. Their pleasures are many and deep. Whereas variety bills offer just that (a bit of this and that, something old, something new, something for everyone), programs devoted to a single maker offer an experience rather like that of dipping



Balanchine's *Swan Lake*

into a volume of collected poetry. There are connections to be made, threads to follow, patterns to be revealed. The New York City Ballet (full season April 30–June 30) offers six such programs, three of Jerome Robbins (May 9 and 21 and June 14; 212-870-5570) and three of George Balanchine (May 4, June 1 and 16). Meanwhile, the American Ballet Theatre (full season April 29–June 22) combines novelty and box-office gold in an all-Twyla Tharp program (May 3, 4, 20, 23, and 25 and June 12; 212-362-6000). These days Tharp is the ABT's hottest choreographic draw, and this season she is not only showing a new dance (still shrouded in mystery and rehearsing behind closed doors at press time) but also amending *Americans We*, new last spring. Coincidentally, May also finds Tharp launching a new ensemble of unknowns billed as an "event" called—you guessed it—*THARP!* Rehearsals are starting now for a fall and winter tour, with twenty cities on the books, and more signing up every day. —N.D.

PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT

They have their Académie; they have their Alliance. It stands to reason that the French would also boast the longest unbroken tradition of classic theater in the West. Indeed, the Comédie-Française, in Paris, can trace its history back to the reign of the Sun King himself, but in recent years its visits to America have all but ceased. True, from our perspective the company's concerns may appear somewhat parochial. Of the dramatists it principally cultivates, only one (Molière) transcends nationality. But for that very reason we may look to the Comédie-Française to preserve in the purest form something individual and essential. This spring the Brooklyn Academy of



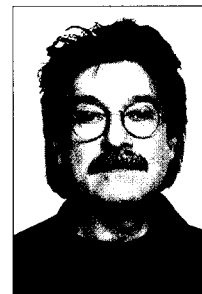
Two Inconstant lovers

Music presents the troupe's celebrated productions of Molière's *Don Juan* and Marivaux's intricate *The Inconstant Lovers*. More shocking to Molière's contemporaries than any sexual predation was the wicked hero's attempt to bribe his servant to blasphemy, which remains strong stuff. In a brighter vein, the Marivaux trifles icily with the follies of the heart. It would take a subtle historian of culture to explain why the tortured faith of one play and the snowflake artifice of the other strike a contemporary nerve—but they do, they do (April 30–May 12; 718-636-4100). —A.B.

Austin Baer is a writer living in New York.
Nancy Dalva is a contributor to Dance Ink.

ON TARGET

In greener times than these Philadelphia's annual American Music Theater Festival used to present a dizzying potpourri of premieres, scoring coups and misses in roughly equal numbers. This year the number of new theater works has dwindled to two, but hopes are high for two bull's-eyes. *Punch & Judy Get Divorced* (May 1–26) combines the talents—authorial, directorial, lyrical, and choreographic—of the father-and-son team of David and Ain Gordon with those of the lyricist Arnold Weinstein. The brochure promises "a post-modern vaudeville romp"; if you find that phrase unappealing, know that the artists have a track record of formal intricacy, high energy, and an anarchic sense of fun. Next up is Jean-Claude van Itallie and Ricky Ian Gordon's *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* (June 8–16), inspired by the mystic Himalayan treatise on the transmigration of the soul. For tickets call 215-893-1145. —A.B.



A father-and-son team

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Correct entries for the Arts & Entertainment Challenge will be eligible for a grand prize—*I Got Rhythm: The Music of George Gershwin*, the four-CD boxed set of Smithsonian recordings reviewed in our December issue (see attached card for details).

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(Continued from page 28)

ily. Fervent and devout, he was described to me by one U.S. intelligence official as “a religious fanatic with enormous wealth—a man with a vision, who knows precisely how he wants to convert that vision into reality.” Bin Laden worked closely with Saudi intelligence and with Prince Salman, the governor of Riyadh, in funding the jihad, and eventually came to Peshawar as a *mujahid* himself. There he befriended Gulbaddin Hekmatyar and Sheikh Omar, and fought with

*It apparently never
occurred to the
Saudi rulers that the
volunteers they sent
might be converted by
the jihad's ideology*



the forces of Abdurrah Rasul Sayyaf. He now divides his time between Khartoum and London, where he owns opulent estates, and he places his formidable wealth at the disposal of militant Islamic groups around the world. Muhammad Jamal Khalifa, Bin Laden's brother-in-law and a Saudi financier, was a prime conduit for funding militant Islamic groups in the Philippines, Filipino officials assert; and, according to U.S. investigators, there is evidence that during the mid-1990s, when Khalifa was the head of the Islamic Relief Agency—a quasi-government Saudi charity—in the Philippines, he had contact with Ramzi Ahmed Yousef, alleged to be the mastermind of the World Trade Center bombing in New York.

Three years ago, at U.S. urging, the Saudi government stripped Bin Laden of his citizenship because of his “irresponsi-

ble behavior . . . and his refusal to obey instructions issued to him.” When I asked a U.S. counterterrorism expert what this meant, he replied, “Osama was warned by Saudi intelligence: Do nothing against us and we’ll leave you alone.” Bin Laden ignored the warnings, and the Saudis began running intelligence operations against him and his entourage in Khartoum; at the time of the Bush Administration—presumably with U.S. knowledge—they had secretly dispatched hit teams with a contract on his life. When the U.S. military headquarters in Saudi Arabia was blown apart, the expert said, “Osama bin Laden was the first guy who came up on the radar screen in Riyadh.”

Some months earlier, when I asked Hosni Mubarak about Bin Laden, he winced. “He wants to take over the world,” he said. “He’s a megalomaniac.” Mubarak then expressed both annoyance and concern about what he saw as the passive attitude of Western governments, particularly those of Britain, Germany, and the United States, in permitting militant Egyptian Islamic groups to operate freely from their soil. But he voiced his greatest concern—rage, really—about Peshawar and the veterans of the jihad.

He told me about a meeting he had had in Bonn, in April of 1993, with Benazir Bhutto's predecessor, Nawaz Sharif. “It was a tough meeting,” he said. “And I couldn’t believe my ears: this man was the leader of Pakistan and he told me, quite frankly, ‘We cannot control Peshawar. We cannot prevent these people from running loose.’ I asked him then if he wanted me to send the Egyptian armed forces to Peshawar to clean up the mess.”

Mubarak may finally be getting his wish. Within a week of the Islamabad bombing Pakistani security forces fanned out across Pakistan and arrested more than 300 people, including numerous militant Pakistani clerics and fundamentalists, some sixty Afghans, and two dozen or so Arabs, some from Peshawar, others from Islamabad. (One, a Saudi national who had arrived in Pakistan during the jihad, was deported in February to Saudi Arabia in connection with his alleged involvement in the car bombing in Riyadh.) The security forces also made arrests at the capital's International Islamic University, which Pakistan's Interior Minister called a “haven for Islamic ter-

rorists.” Ramzi Ahmed Yousef spent a considerable amount of time at the university before his extradition to the United States, in February of last year; Sheikh Omar lectured there; and Sheikh Azzam was once a tenured professor there. The university's primary benefactors have been the Saudis, who, according to Pakistani officials, used the university as a cover during the jihad for the funneling of fighters, money, and arms.

IN the last days of December, Sheikh Omar confounded prison officials by refusing to take his medications for diabetes, high blood pressure, and a heart condition, and thus became a prisoner of great concern to the U.S. government. When I saw him last year, I asked how he felt now that, having worked alongside the governments of Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and the United States in Afghanistan, he was facing charges in the United States that could imprison him for life. Many of his followers in Egypt and Saudi Arabia who had fought in the jihad were being tried and imprisoned, and a number had been hanged in Egypt, solely for participating in that war.

“We have an expression in Arabic,” he replied. “‘Everybody sings for those whom he loves.’ In effect, it means that everyone is singing for something different. And that is exactly what happened in Afghanistan. Do you think we were naive enough to believe that the United States government was helping the Afghans because it believed in their cause—to raise the flag of jihad for Islam? That they were helping a people, a country, to free themselves? Absolutely not. The Americans were there to punish the Soviet Union, and when they were sure that the Soviet Union had suffered and was about to collapse, they stopped everything—all the aid, all the equipment—just like that.” He snapped his fingers, and his voice began to rise. “They didn’t care that there was still a Communist government in power in Afghanistan. They simply turned their backs and walked away. And the Saudis, oh, the Saudis, and the Egyptians—they did precisely the same. It took three more years for the *mujahideen* to oust the Najibullah regime. Thousands of lives were lost; crops and livelihoods were destroyed. But not one life mattered to the Saudis, the Egyptians, or the United States.” ☛

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Hopper's House by the Railroad

Someplace Like Home

An eerily familiar house rises in many American landscapes

THIRTY miles north of Manhattan, hard by the old brickmaking village of Haverstraw, New York, stands a mansard-roofed house that occupies a peculiar place in our collective store of images. The first time I passed the house, it stopped me dead: it was as familiar and disquieting as a recurring dream.

The house was built in 1885, near the crest of a hill that rises steeply from the west bank of the Hudson River. By the turn of the century it had been abandoned; neighborhood children called it haunted. During the First World War the house was used as an open shelter by vagrants, who slept on mounds of hay in

the kitchen. In 1919 it was bought by the district attorney of Rockland County, Thomas Gagan. His eldest daughter, Amo, one of six children, occupied a room on the second floor, facing the river, and lived in the house for forty-one years. Recently she told me that in 1925, when she was thirteen, she looked out her bedroom window and saw a man sitting across the road, painting. The man was Edward Hopper; the small canvas on his portable easel became *House by the Railroad*, a dominant

work of twentieth-century American art.

That canvas, acquired in 1930 by the fledgling Museum of Modern Art, was the very first painting in the museum's collection. In the years since, *House by the Railroad* has become an icon in the dream-scape of American isolation. The picture's quality of solitude is due in part to the radical surgery performed upon the model by the artist, who reinvented the architecture of many of his subjects. In this case he amputated the entire right side of the building, leaving the central tower central to nothing, and removed the back rooms, the surrounding buildings, the trees in front of the house, and the hillside behind it. The house stands alone but for the tracks, themselves a sign of abandonment.

In 1960 Alfred Hitchcock chose Hopper's version of this house as the template for the dwelling of Norman Bates and his mother in *Psycho*. Charles Addams drew a similarly sinister mansion for his cartoon family. Under a Technicolor Texas sky in George Stevens's *Giant* (1956) a reconstruction of the house is the focus of a triangle formed by James Dean, Rock Hudson, and Elizabeth Taylor. In Terence Malick's *Days of Heaven* (1978) a surreal variant of the house rises from a bleaker Texas plain as home to a dying landowner, played by Sam Shepard. "The house shines with finality," the poet Mark Strand has written of

Bottom left: drawing by Charles Addams © 1945 The New Yorker Magazine, Inc., all rights reserved; bottom right: Paul Bochner; top: Museum of Modern Art



Home of the Addams Family



The original house, in Haverstraw, New York, today

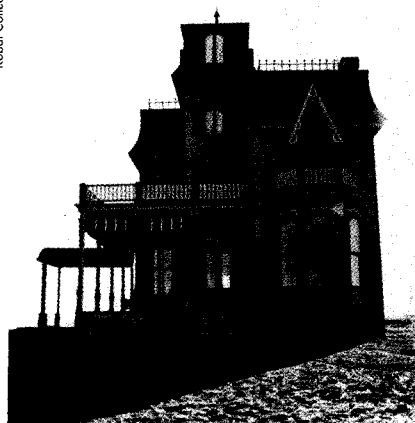
Hopper's painting. "It is like a coffin."

Having passed the house often, I walked for the first time through the front door—obsured in the painting by Hopper's brush—one recent morning. The once-grand residence has been divided into six apartments, and is home to twenty people. In the central hall the only furniture was a discarded refrigerator; the ample arches leading from it had been filled with sheets of plywood, hollow-core doors fitted within them. The parquet floors were covered in linoleum, the high plaster ceilings hidden by acoustic tiles. The marble mantles, Tiffany chandeliers, and etched glass had been removed long ago, but a mahogany banister still beckoned up the stairs. On the second floor I knocked on an apartment door. The tenant, a working mother who lives with her four children, aged seven through thirteen, invited me in.

For some time I stood at Amo Gagan's old window, gazing at its broad view of the Hudson. The train tracks are still there, though the little Haverstraw station has been remodeled as a lawyer's office. Westchester was an abstract stroke of green between silver water and the light of river clouds. I imagined what young Miss Gagan saw when she spotted Hopper from this room seventy years ago; I know where he was sitting.

Behind me the children were watching a raucous confessional talk show. Through the window came the dull roar of traffic on Route 9-W, just steps from the front porch. Not far away shimmered the mirage of home promised by bright, familiar logos. It was as if time had fulfilled Hopper's vision of this house by the railroad, enfolding it in the cluttered landscape that is at once no place and everywhere. ☼

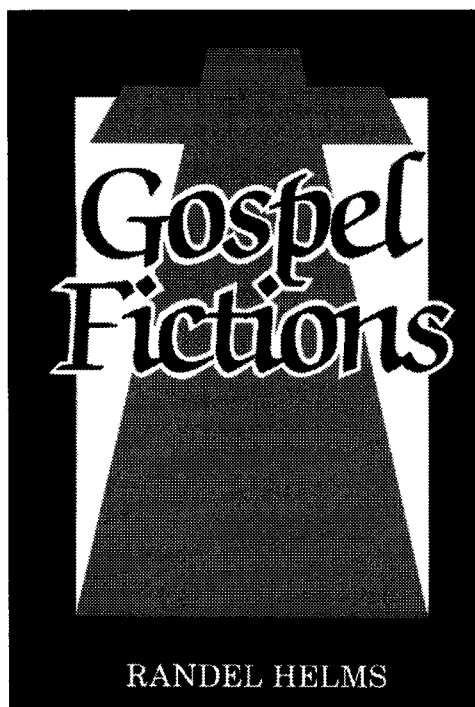
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The house in Days of Heaven

GOSPEL FICTIONS

by Randel Helms



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The Protean President

Changed, changed utterly

BILL Clinton was elected President of the United States on the promise that he would reform and restore order to Democratic liberalism. For his re-election campaign Clinton has established a new purpose: to reform and restore order to Republican conservatism.

by Thomas Byrne Edsall

The Clinton agenda of 1992 required a level of will and determination seen in recent years only on the right, in such figures as Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan. Once in office, Clinton largely abandoned that mission, and in the election of 1994 the bottom fell out

for the Democratic Party. What he did not do for the left, he will do for the right. His bid to lead a reborn Democratic Party into the twenty-first century may have imploded on November 8, 1994, but his responsiveness to an ever-changing electorate has found new means of expression—as a brake on the excesses of an ascendant right.

With the Republican Congress claiming a mandate to end spiraling deficits, subsidies for the undeserving poor, and violence and illegitimacy in the underclass, Clinton now stands apart from

both parties, accepting the shift to the right but determined to protect the elderly and the innocent. To establish his new persona and purpose, Clinton has acquired a fresh set of advisers. The 1992 team of deeply partisan Democrats—James Carville, Stanley Greenberg, Paul Begala, and Mandy Grunwald—has been replaced largely by a crew of the politically ambidextrous: Dick Morris, a Democrat turned Republican turned Democrat who does not think in terms of partisan gain; Morris's favored pollsters, Doug Schoen and Mark Penn, who, with roots in New York rather than Washington, are less mired than other pollsters in the partisan battleground; and the media consultant Robert Squier, who has watched his clientele of centrist Democratic senators become roadkill for the new Republican majority.

The 1996 campaign will test whether it is possible to win re-election amid the wreckage of the lost opportunity of 1992. Clinton's victorious drive to the White House—a campaign infused with explicit and symbolic messages on race, values, taxes, responsibility, and the work ethic—laid the groundwork for a revival of a competitive Democratic Party. Clinton drove home the message that the party, embroiled in the upheavals of multiple rights revolutions, had allowed liberalism to become a constrictive orthodoxy, unable to set priorities or to foster responsibility.

The politics of identity—of race, ethnicity, sex, and sexual orientation—had taken over the moral core of liberalism. The Clinton campaign sought to subordinate identity politics to more broadly held beliefs and goals. The genius of Clinton's confrontation with Jesse Jackson over Sister Souljah, in June of 1992, for example, lay in his use of the event to affirm integrationist principle, not to reject it.

Clinton's opportunity upon election was to relocate Democratic liberalism within a distinctive and resonant American ethic, and to stanch the bleeding of a political left that had come to stand increasingly in opposition to the culture and values of a crucial Democratic constituency: working men and women without college degrees, with incomes at

or below the median. In the 1992 campaign Clinton had taken a first step toward bringing white working- and lower-middle-class voters back to the Democratic Party. These voters stand at the fulcrum of American politics. When they lean to the right, they empower a conservative, top-down majority. When they shift to the left, they make possible a restoration of the bottom-up coalition that led the Democratic Party to victory for two generations.

These voters determine the shape of the majority coalition in American elections. When they are persuaded, as they were by the brand of liberalism that arose in the mid-1960s, that the function of government is to collect tax dollars in order to finance an agenda tilting private and public workplaces and schools away from their interests, these voters become a powerful ally of the Republican Party. When they are persuaded that government can work to take care of their future and their families, to foster a workplace with the potential for security and advancement, and to enlarge educational opportunity for their children, these voters become the mainstay of the Democratic Party. Republicans scare these voters away when their policies are seen as favoring the rich at the expense of the working and middle classes. Democrats lose these voters when they focus on the politics of redistribution on the basis of sex, race, ethnicity, or sexual orientation.

The rhetoric of Clinton's 1992 campaign reads like a prose poem directed to this crucial constituency:

"As President, I'll see that [young people] get the same deal everyone should have: [they've got to] play by the rules, stay off drugs, stay in school, and stay off the streets. Don't have children if you're not prepared to support them, because governments don't raise children, people do."

"I can't be for quotas. . . . I'm for responsibility at every turn."

"I do want to say something to the fathers in this country who have chosen to abandon their children by neglecting their child support. Take responsibility for your children or we will force you to do so."

There is a wealth of poll data to document that Clinton, despite winning with 43 percent of the vote, was positioned in the period immediately after the 1992

election to transform American policy. In January of 1993 the Republican Ed Goeas and the Democrat Celinda Lake together conducted one of a series of "battleground" polls on a wide range of issues, testing the relative strength of Clinton and the Democratic Party on one side, and Republicans in Congress on the other. By huge margins the public favored Clinton and the Democrats over the Republicans on reforming welfare (by 39 points), on reducing the deficit (28 points), on improving health care (55 points), and on improving education (46 points). Clinton and the Democrats even held an eight-point advantage on the traditionally Republican issue of "holding the line on taxes."

The climate was ideal for an incoming Democratic President. The real opportunity awaiting Clinton lay in the potential his campaign had established to break the racial logjam that has become the defining quandary of American politics. An important subtext of the election had been the preliminary formation of a black leadership structure committed to policies, rhetoric, and coalition strategies far less confrontational than those of Jesse Jackson. Prominent among the new black leadership were the Democratic U.S. Representatives John Lewis, of Georgia, Mike Espy, of Mississippi, and Bill Jefferson, of Louisiana; an emerging generation of black mayors, including Michael White, of Cleveland, and Norm Rice, of Seattle, who were winning office just as such past leaders as Wilson Goode, David Dinkins, Eugene Sawyer, and Coleman Young faced defeat or retirement; and growing numbers of state legislators and city-council members. The new leaders were acutely aware that Democratic majorities were dependent on biracial coalitions, and that holding too tightly to liberal social and racial orthodoxies often alienated white supporters. In addition, these blacks were the linchpins of any Democratic strategy to enact substantial welfare reform.

In the weeks before the 1992 election the black political community was undergoing constructive upheaval. "I think what we are witnessing is what I call a quiet revolution in American politics," John Lewis said. "In the communities I deal with, people want to win; they want to see a Democrat in the White House. . . . They understand that in order to win, it is



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necessary to bring back those [white] individuals who had left the party.” Kay Patterson, a state senator from South Carolina, praised Clinton for his confrontation with Jesse Jackson over Sister Souljah. “I think it helped him,” Patterson said. “He didn’t have to bow down and kowtow to Jesse, and personally I like that. Hell, be your own man, not bowing and scraping, getting splinters in your head. . . . Jesse Jackson can shake the apples from the tree, but he doesn’t know how to make the jelly from the apples.” Arthur Blackwell, then the chairman of the Wayne County [Detroit] Commission, who differed with Clinton on trade policy and the death penalty, asked, “Is it more important for him to appeal on every single thing and lose, or sixty to seventy percent and win? I would argue the latter. Having someone like Mondale and Dukakis say exactly what you want them to say and losing? You should never compromise your integrity or principles, but you are in the business to win. You have to evaluate how to win.”

INSTEAD of capitalizing on his election victory to secure the gains he and his party had made, Clinton undermined both in the initial months of his Administration. Misled into thinking he had won the war, he began to distribute the spoils of victory: For gays, he locked himself into providing access to the military. For women and blacks, Hispanics, and other minorities, he set what amounted to fixed goals for filling not only symbolic Cabinet seats but also appointive positions throughout the federal political structure. For the nation’s big cities, he proposed a \$16.3 billion economic-stimulus bill. In support of the goal of empowering women, Clinton turned over to his wife what would be the most important initiative of his presidency to date—health-care reform.

The image of a presidency committed more to liberal orthodoxy than to the public welfare was created not by any single act or order but by the accumulation of decisions and events: the failed appointments of Kimba Wood and Zoe Baird as Attorney General, and of Lani Guinier as the assistant attorney general in charge of civil rights; the immediate rescission of executive orders issued during the Reagan and Bush presidencies which had curtailed the use of federal

dollars in abortion counseling and fetal research; the early presence of Barbra Streisand and other leaders of the Hollywood liberal community—the so-called lifestyle left—at the White House; the continuing emphasis by Surgeon General Joycelyn Elders on the most controversial dimensions of human sexuality; the abandonment of the pledge to cut middle-class taxes and its replacement by legislation raising gasoline taxes.

Clinton not only overestimated the magnitude of his election victory but initially proceeded to govern as if cultural and social post-sixties liberalism had won, when in fact a moderated centrism had won. The primary criticism leveled by the American public at the two parties is that each submits excessively to interests with disproportionate power in its coalition. Such interests inside the Democratic coalition are seen as blacks, Hispanics, feminists, the social-welfare lobby, homosexuals, urban political organizations, government workers, peace and anti-nuclear activists, criminal-defense and civil-plaintiff lawyers, and regulators indifferent to the costs, incentives, or market impact of regulation. The interests inside the Republican coalition are seen as wealthy corporations seeking still greater power, including unchecked access to natural resources; those who would restrict opportunity for women or blacks; those who would impose oppressive moral values on others; and free-market purists who recognize no need for government protection of consumers, workers, the disabled, or the elderly.

Within this context unbridled contemporary Democratic liberalism becomes functionally conservative, in that it drives the electorate to the right. When such liberalism dominates the Democratic Party, as it did in 1972, 1980, 1984, 1988, and 1994, conservatism is the victor.

In the decades from 1968 to 1988 Clinton watched, participated in, and came to understand the underlying logic of the defeat of Democratic liberalism. In office, however, he was not prepared to impose on his own party—on his own friends and colleagues—the costs of reform. The cumulative effect of events during Clinton’s first two years in office was the loss of an opportunity to revive and enlighten the Democratic Party. A Goias-Lake battleground poll conducted in April of last year documented the collapse of public

support for Clinton and his party. The 39-point advantage they had held over congressional Republicans on the issue of welfare had shifted to a 21-point disadvantage—a 60-point swing. Their 28-point advantage on reducing the deficit had become a 23-point disadvantage—a shift of 51 points. Their advantage on health care dwindled from 55 points to 12, and their advantage on education fell from 46 points to nine. Their eight-point advantage on holding the line on taxes had become a 22-point disadvantage—a swing of 30 points.

In the process Clinton lost control not only of the budget and welfare debates but also of the larger agenda of restoring government to its role as the ally of those “who work hard and play by the rules.” The Republicans captured the public’s interest with their criticism of the Great Society, of cultural, moral, and racial liberalism, of social engineering, of welfare, and of the welfare state itself.

Clinton demonstrated in his detailed preparation for the 1992 campaign a full understanding of the liabilities of liberalism, and he failed as President to sustain the struggle to reform liberalism.

IF Clinton has a central strength, however, it is the capacity to adapt politically to adversity and the threat of defeat. He has responded to the Republican sweep of 1994 by radically altering the goals and character of his presidency. He has adopted the role of a tactician facing a larger, better-equipped, but not necessarily better-led army. His daily task is to determine how much ground to cede to his adversaries on the right while maintaining his image as the defender of certain core liberal values. The ground Clinton is prepared to give up encompasses both spending and principle. During last year’s budget negotiations the Administration proposed four spending plans, each more stringent than the last: the first accepted red ink deep into the future; the second called for a nominally balanced budget in ten years; the third provided for balance in seven years, using the favorable economic forecasts of the Office of Management and Budget; and the fourth acceded to Republican demands for a balanced budget by the year 2002, using Congressional Budget Office projections of growth, inflation, and national savings.

Although Clinton vetoed the first welfare-reform measure sent to him by the Republican congressional majority, he has signaled a willingness to accept legislation abandoning the federal guarantee of support for impoverished children.

The danger facing Clinton is that his presidency will not provide a brake on conservatism, a fire wall against the challenge from the right, but rather—even if, and perhaps especially if, he is re-elected—it will first fuel and then legitimate a revolution that Clinton in no way endorses.

Clinton's presence in the White House has facilitated the work of the conservative revolutionaries in a way that a fully Republican-controlled government could not have. In his bargaining with the congressional leadership Clinton has moved much further to the right than Ronald Reagan would have considered doing. In the past year Clinton has attempted to structure his Administration as a rear-guard holding action, protecting whatever possible of the liberal state. In practice, however, he has been a crucial, if unknowing, participant in an assault on that very state. For both the public and the press, the bipartisan nature of the debate in Washington gives the prospective outcome a legitimacy and a protective cover that would not be possible if a Republican were in the White House with Republican majorities in the House and the Senate.

The Clinton Administration and congressional Democrats are prepared to treat the mere survival of a severely cut back Legal Services Corporation as a victory. The President has signed into law measures that cut spending on the Appalachian Regional Commission from \$282 million to \$170 million, that reduce subsidies for the operating costs of mass transit by 30 percent, and that bar the use of federal money to pay for abortions for workers covered by taxpayer-subsidized federal health insurance—except in cases of rape, incest, or a threat to the life of the mother.

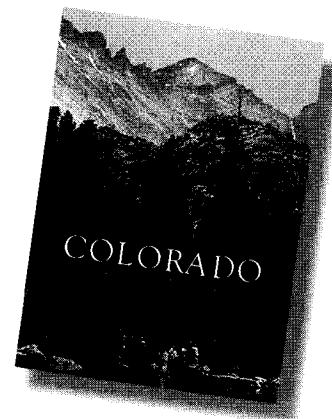
Clinton had by the start of this year acceded to the goal of a balanced budget within seven years—which by the account of his own chief of staff, Leon Panetta, "cost us \$400 or \$500 billion" in future spending authority. That loss removes any chance of pressing for the kind of social investment in infrastruc-

ture and human capital that Clinton has repeatedly called for in order to improve national competitiveness and to counter trends toward growing inequality of income.

The force most likely to prevent Clinton from inadvertently assuming the role of facilitator is the compelling drive on the right for political, as opposed to policy, victory. The Republican leadership and freshmen in the House, a substantial segment of the conservative foundation and interest-group community, and most of the many pollsters, consultants, party managers, and campaign operatives are so deeply committed to a partisan takeover of Washington that they do not see the potential in Clinton to serve as an unsuspecting ally of their cause. The partisan intractability of these forces has prevented the leaders of the conservative revolution from taking full advantage of Clinton's weakened position to win policy achievements in the budget, on entitlement programs, and on welfare which would have been inconceivable during the Reagan or Bush Administration. Instead the leaders of the Republican Party have, through intransigence, given the impression that they, too, are bound by the orthodoxies of their party, just as the Democrats are bound by the mandates of liberal interest groups. As Republicans have pressed partisan interests over policy gains, their party's poll ratings have declined. In the most recent (at this writing) battleground poll, conducted last January, Clinton had gained a slight but not comprehensive advantage over the Republican congressional leadership and prospective Republican presidential candidates.

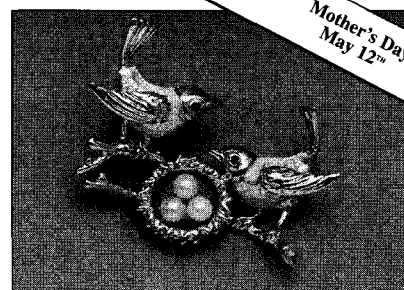
The election of 1996 will be driven, then, by forces that the central actors, Clinton and his Republican adversaries, do not themselves understand—including their own roles in the grand debate. Largely through his actions in the first two years of his presidency, Clinton politically empowered conservative Republicanism. In the second two years he has provided crucial authorization to the conservative majority in its revolutionary challenge to the social contracts of the New Deal and the Great Society. Clinton won election as an agent of change, but the change to be wrought during his tenure is very different from what he envisaged when he took the oath of office, on January 20, 1993. ☼

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In Tune With Ireland

The annual Wexford Festival makes opera great fun

FOR centuries Ireland has produced far more great writers than any country of its size deserved to, but literature seems to have exhausted Irish creativity.

There are very few famous Irish painters (though I am fond of Daniel Maclise, Nathaniel Hone, and Jack B. Yeats, the

brother of the more famous W. B.), and classical music in Ireland has been a thin business. True, Handel's *Messiah* was first performed in

by Geoffrey Wheatcroft

Dublin, but that's one of those cu-

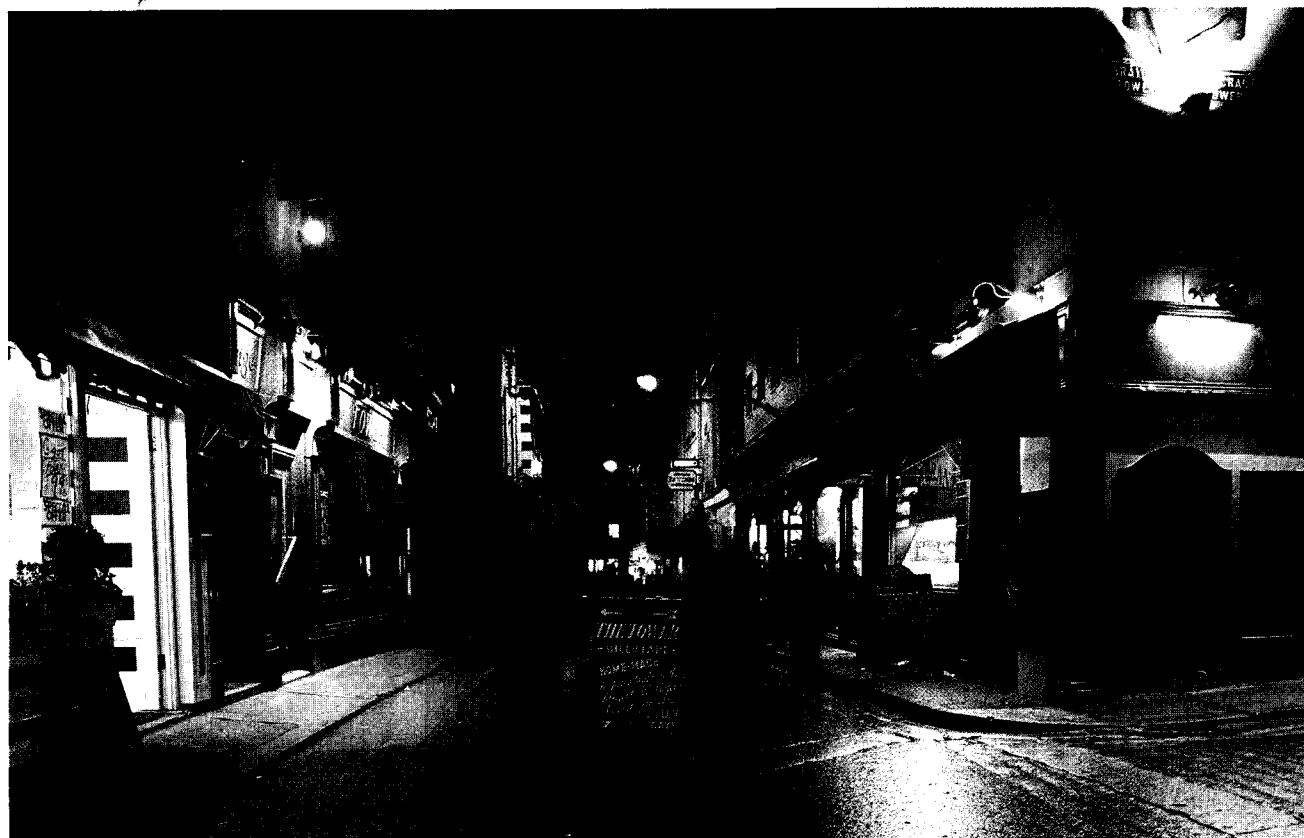
riosities with which the tediously well-informed music lover can win bets—like the fact that Verdi's *La forza del destino*

was first performed in St. Petersburg or Stravinsky's *The Rake's Progress* at La Fenice in Venice (bitterly mourned as I write). Since Handel's day Ireland has had no permanent opera company and, for that matter, no proper symphony orchestra, until recently.

And so a half century ago an Irish provincial town seemed about the most unlikely and unpropitious place in Europe to start an opera festival. Something as unlikely as that needs a visionary or a crackpot. Wexford had Doctor Tom. T. J. Walsh was born in Wexford in 1911, and having qualified as a doctor in Dublin, returned to his home town to practice. There he stayed until he died, in 1988, just short of his seventy-seventh birthday, laden with honors and love. He is still missed.

He would be missed if he had been only a good doctor and a good man. But Doctor Tom was also an opera buff, who decided that his town should have its own opera festival. There have been other im-

On Main Street, around the corner from the Wexford Festival's Theatre Royal

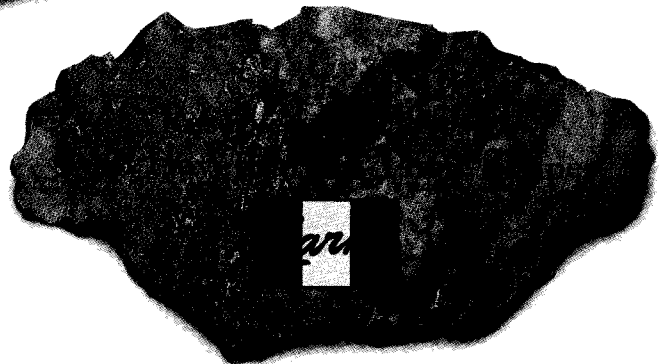


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probable venues for opera, from Montepulciano, in the Tuscan hills, to Cooperstown, in upstate New York, but I don't think there can ever have been such an odd idea as Doctor Tom's. Wexford had never been notable as a cultural center. It is a pleasant little country town in the far southeast of Ireland, rising imposingly above the estuary of the Slaney River. Two grand Victorian-Gothic churches dominate it, above a warren of narrow streets and alleys running down to the quay.

Having also decided that if Wexford was to have a festival, it needed an opera house, Doctor Tom serendipitously found the Theatre Royal, a delightful Georgian building on High Street. Despite its name, the street is about twenty feet wide, and despite *its*, the theater is a little gem that at first held fewer than 400 people and even now, after discreet enlargement, holds only 550. The theater was disused for generations, but under Doctor Tom's direction it was cleared out and tidied up, and an opera was put on.

That was in 1951.

A mostly Irish cast was assembled, along with what was then the Radio Eireann Light Orchestra, for a few performances of *The Rose of Castile*, by Michael Balfe, a nineteenth-century Irish composer with Wexford connections, before tiny audiences. Over the next few years the festival presented operas by Donizetti, Bellini, and Rossini—most of them then rarely heard, though some now standard repertory. But by the 1960s Wexford had acquired its unique mission: finding fine but little-known artists to perform operas that even the buffest of buffs know only as names from reference books.

THE first year I went was 1969, when Wexford did Haydn's *L'infedeltà delusa* and Verdi's *Luisa Miller*, and with rare exceptions the eighty or so operas I've heard in the Theatre Royal have been pieces I didn't know before and haven't come upon since. Forgotten works are often forgotten with good rea-

run *con amore*. Again, productions vary. Every year there seems to be one good, one painful, and one brilliant production. The first night of Spontini's *La vestale* in 1979 was a memorable fiasco: a sharply sloping stage had been inadvertently cleaned of its intentionally sticky surface, and in the first act the singers tried to sing

while sliding downhill or falling over. Sad to say, it was terribly funny, if not for the singers or the director. But it was also at Wexford that I first saw the stellar work of very young directors who have since become internationally famous: David Pountney, who recently directed Philip Glass's *The Voyage* at the Met, and Nicholas Hytner, who could have retired on the proceeds of *Miss Saigon* but who has instead gone on to direct *The Madness of King George*, among other works.

Musical standards have always been remarkable at Wexford. What was long the orchestra of RTE, the Irish broadcasting company, and is now the Irish National Symphony Orchestra, doesn't have the fame (or the money) of the Berliners or

the Viennese, but it is damned good. No artist goes to Wexford for the fees, but it is a career showcase, and the management is always looking for good singers who aren't yet megastars. The bright light of the early seventies was the delicious Martiniquan soprano Christiane Eda-Pierre, and of the early eighties the Russian baritone Sergei Leiferkus, who made his Western debut at Wexford before going on to international stardom.

At least one operatic marriage was made at Wexford: the English tenor Philip Langridge and the Irish mezzo Ann Murray met in Cavalli's *Eritrea*. That was also

BOTH PHOTOGRAPHS: PETER ZOLLER/THE SLIDE FILE



Wexford's Selskar Abbey and the Sallee Islands bird sanctuary

son. I don't think I shall mind not hearing Ricci's *La serva e l'ussero* or Lalo's *Le roi d'Ys* again. And a double bill of *Don Giovanni* and *Turandot*—Gazzaniga's *Don Giovanni Tenorio* and Busoni's *Turandot*—seemed a little too cute. But there have also been some real discoveries, operas worth the journey in themselves: Massenet's *Hérodiade*, say, and Dvořák's *The Devil and Kate*.

Wexford began as an amateur—maybe even amateurish—affair. Doctor Tom was the amateur artistic director until 1966. But the word “amateur” comes from a word for “love,” and Wexford is

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the year when most of the tenors in the chorus were energetically gay. One Wexford landlady was heard to complain, "I've nothing against them boys, but would you listen to the clatterin' and crashin' upstairs—and now the Pope's fallen from off the wall!" which became a company catchphrase for the whole season. Wexford is like that: not crashing tenors or falling Popes but a company, like Glyndebourne in England, that comes together for several intense weeks, with its own romances, scandals, and jokes, and also with a spirit that shows on stage.

It's precisely this quality that explains why, for some of us, Wexford has become the best-loved event on the musical calendar. Festivals begun by true enthusiasts almost always atrophy, as artistic sclerosis is accompanied by social opulence. Salzburg is the prime case: once a great artistic event, now a place that gives vulgar cosmopolitan plutocracy a bad name. If you can manage to get a \$200-plus ticket, you may just hear the music above the rustle of furs and the clank of jewelry.

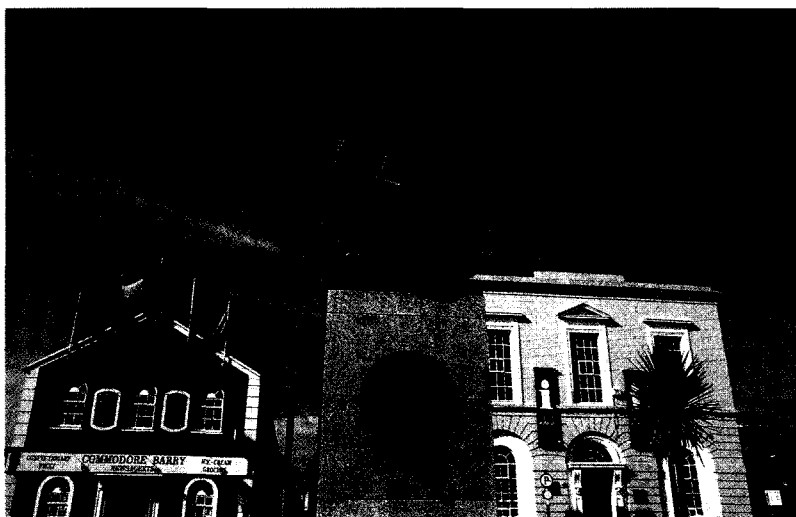
TO be sure, Wexford itself has changed in the years I have known it: the town, the audience, and the festival. It isn't easy to convey, or even remember, just how parochial and impoverished rural Ireland was as late as the 1960s. Since then it has become much more prosperous, a prosperity visible in the shopping streets and just about every other part of town. The audience now includes more visitors from outside the British Isles, and among the local attenders there is less evidence of the "West Brits" or the Anglo-Irish, and more of Dublin's own new class, affluent and confident business folk and professionals.

The repertory is still delightfully recondite: next October, Donizetti's *Parisina*, Meyerbeer's *L'étoile du nord*, and Fibich's *Sárka* (no, I haven't seen any of them before either) will be given. But the ama-

teur ethos has gently evolved. Elaine Padmore was the artistic director from 1982 to 1994, the longest tenure since Doctor Tom's own, and made the name that has now taken her to run the Royal Opera in Copenhagen. She knocked some of the rough edges off the way the festival was run, and enlarged and redecorated the Theatre Royal as well. Her successor, Luigi Ferrari, has brought in some excellent Italian singers and introduced a predominantly professional chorus instead of local lads and lasses. Needless to say, we old hands have been quietly grumbling that Wexford is becoming a little too slick. But somehow I

is Dunganstown, the ancestral homestead of the Kennedy family, with the John F. Kennedy Park and Arboretum nearby. From there you can go on to New Ross, whence a barge cruises up the river Nore and back, serving a lavish lunch on the way. Or you can go south to the haunting ruin of Dunbrody Abbey, and then to the little village of Ballyhack, on Waterford Harbour, to eat at the excellent Neptune fish restaurant. In Wexford town the best place to eat—apart from the two big hotels, the Talbot and White's—is the Ocean Bed near Westgate.

And there are the bars. Yes, the bars of Wexford require a treatise of their own, which I am well equipped to write. At least one gentle pub crawl is de rigueur: down Main Street, stopping maybe at Kehoe's and the Goal Bar, and then back along the seafront, choosing from another three or four bars. Since the Guinness company has been the most generous sponsor of the festival over the years, the least you can do is to repay it a little. In any case, you will be



On Wexford's Crescent Quay, the Irish-American hero John Barry

don't think it will ever lose its charm.

Opera is only one of the reasons for visiting Wexford. Doctor Tom chose October and November to test opera lovers' mettle: Irish weather then is at best what's called soft. Apart from the black-tie evening dress that everyone admirably wears at the opera, you need warm waterproof clothes. But the countryside and coastscape are no less beautiful for that. There are plenty of sights to be seen nearby—Johnstown Castle, Rathmacknee Castle, and bird sanctuaries among them. I like walking on the seabird-packed shore just to the north of Wexford, which is pleasingly called the Slob.

Irish-Americans will want to pay their respects to Commodore John Barry, the father of the U.S. Navy, who gave the Brits a gratifying licking during the War of Independence. His statue stands on the quay; his birthplace is Ballysampsion, ten miles from Wexford. Twenty miles to the west, on the far side of County Wexford,

finding a warmth of welcome that makes every other music festival I know look distinctly chilly.

October will see my twenty-eighth Wexford running, and I look forward to many more. I hope to be there in 2001 for the festival's fiftieth anniversary and, God willing, in 2011 for Doctor Tom's hundredth. "International opera" has become depressingly homogenized and glitzy. It took an Irish provincial doctor to show that opera can be curious, vibrant, and fun. ☞

This year's Wexford Festival runs from October 17 to November 3. Tickets go on sale June 4 at the Theatre Royal, Wexford, Ireland; call 011-353-53-22144 or fax 011-353-53-24289. Prices had not been fixed at writing but will be slightly more than last year's \$55 for weekdays, \$73 weekends. The Irish Tourist Board, at 345 Park Avenue, New York, NY 10154 (212-418-0800), can provide suggestions about where to stay in Wexford and other information.

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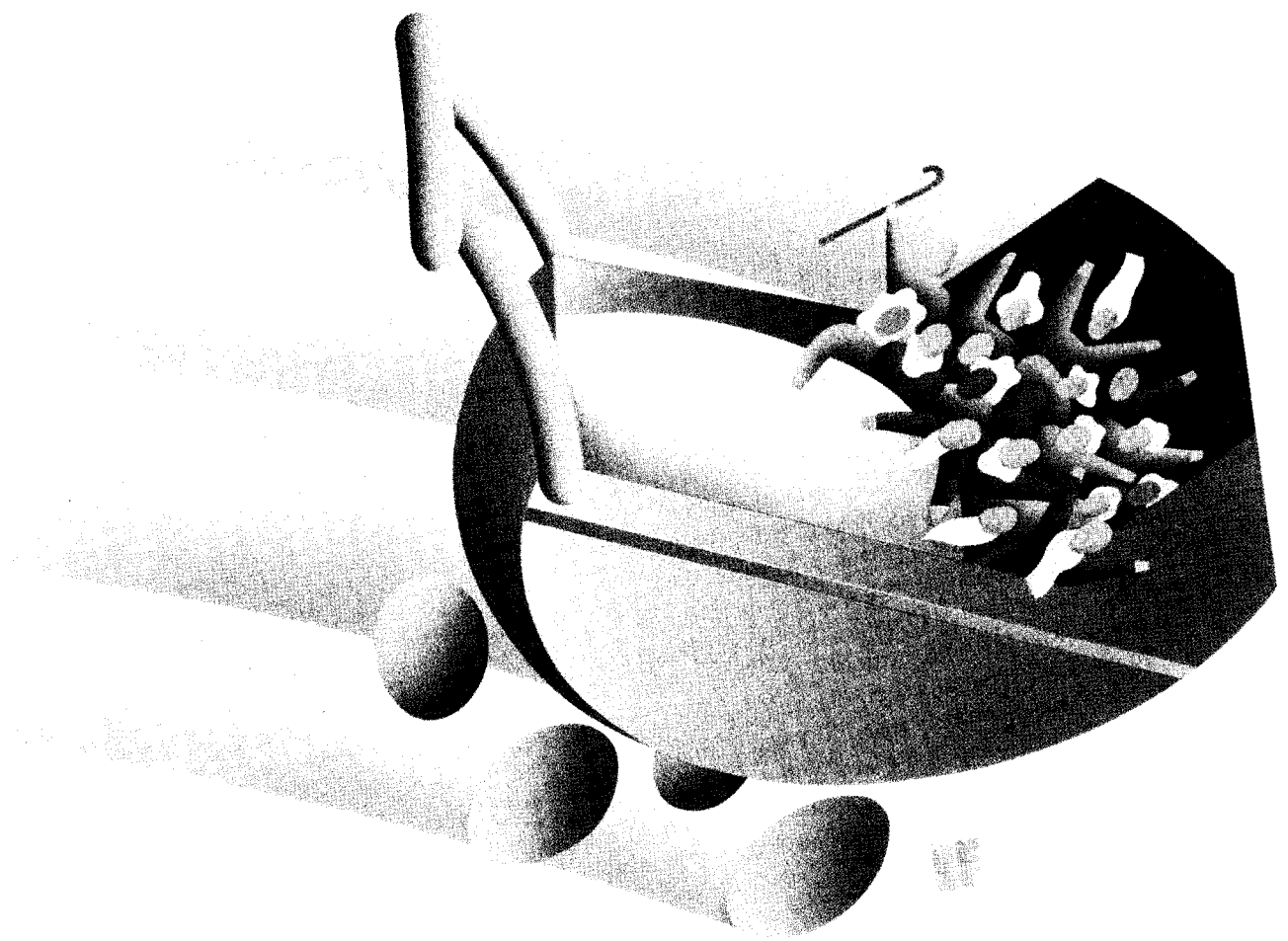
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WILL AMERICA GROW UP BEFORE IT GROWS OLD?



The long gray wave of Baby Boomers retiring could lead to an all-en-gulfing economic crisis—unless we balance the budget, rein in senior entitlements, raise retirement ages, and boost individual and pension savings. Yet politicians of both parties say that most of the urgently necessary reforms are “off the table.” **by PETER G. PETERSON**

Illustrations by Nicholas Gaetano

THE ATLANTIC MONTHLY

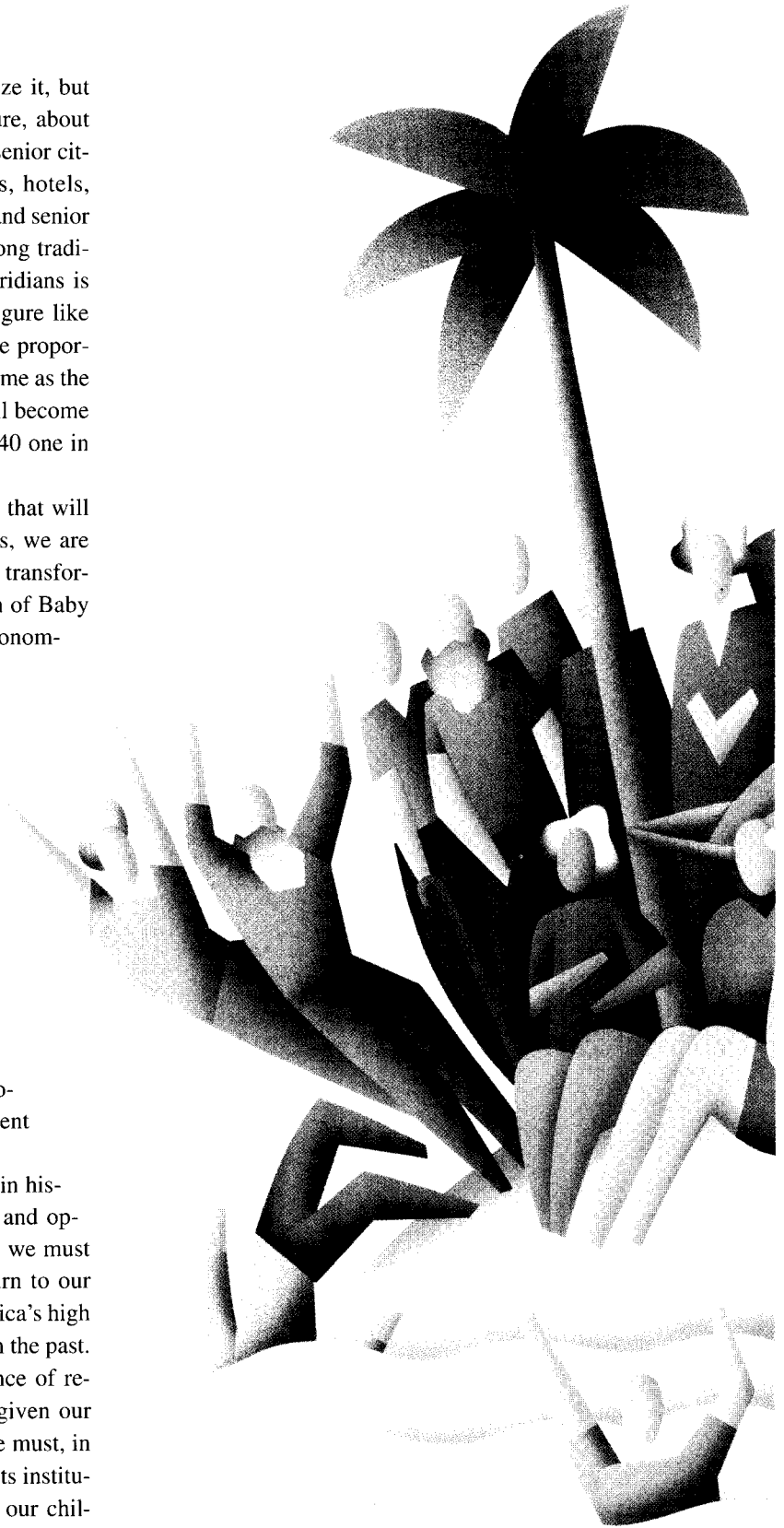
A NATION OF FLORIDAS

BEEN to Florida lately? You may not realize it, but you have seen the future—America's future, about two decades from now. The gray wave of senior citizens that fills the state's streets, beaches, parks, hotels, shopping malls, hospitals, Social Security offices, and senior centers is, of course, an anomaly created by our long tradition of retiring to Florida. Nearly one in five Floridians is over sixty-five. But early in the next century a figure like that won't be exceptional. By 2025 at the latest the proportion of all Americans who are elderly will be the same as the proportion in Florida today. America, in effect, will become a nation of Floridas—and then keep aging. By 2040 one in four Americans may be over sixty-five.

When we consider the great demographic shift that will shape our national future over the next fifty years, we are speaking not of a mere transition but of a genuine transformation. Just fifteen years from now the first batch of Baby Boomers will hit sixty-five, bringing changes—economic, political, social, cultural, and ethical—that will transform American society. This transformation will challenge the very core of our national psyche, which has always been predicated on fresh beginnings, childlike optimism, and aspiring new generations. How we cope with the cultural dimensions of this challenge I will leave to others—to sociologists, political scientists, historians, and philosophers. I am none of these. I am a businessman who has long participated in public debates over the political economy of rising living standards. What concerns me most about America's coming demographic transformation is simply this: on our present course we won't be able to afford it.

To provide for the largest generation of seniors in history while simultaneously investing in education and opportunity for the youth of the twenty-first century, we must reject the prevailing "entitlement ethic" and return to our former "endowment ethic," which generated America's high savings, high growth, and rising living standards in the past. Endowment implies "stewardship"—the acceptance of responsibility for the future of an institution. But given our current emphasis on individual self-fulfillment, we must, in addition to endowing the future of our nation and its institutions, endow our individual futures and those of our children, because no one else is going to do it for us. What I am talking about is *self-endowment*.

"Hope I die before I get old," The Who sang in their clas-



IN 1900 ONLY ONE IN TWENTY-FIVE AMERICANS WAS OVER SIXTY-FIVE.

sic sixties anthem, "My Generation." That statement, like so many slogans of the Baby Boomers' youth culture, was wishful thinking. The generation that once warned "Don't trust anyone over thirty" is now passing fifty.

The real question is, Will America grow up before it grows old? Will we make the needed transformation early, intelligently, and humanely, or procrastinate until delay exacts a huge price from those least able to afford it—and confronts us with an economic and political crisis to which there is no longer a win-win solution?

DEMOGRAPHICS IS DESTINY

WITHIN the next fifteen years the huge generation of Baby Boomers, whose parents brought them into the world with such optimism, will begin to retire. As they do, they will expect the munificent array of "entitlements" that were guaranteed (again with such optimism) to every retiring American with no anticipation of the ever-growing length of retirement as life expectancy increases or the ever-rising expectations of independence, affluence, health, and comfort of life in retirement. But consider who is expected to pay for this late-in-life consumption: the relatively small "bust" generation in whose productive capacity we have failed to invest. Neither the founders of Social Security sixty years ago nor the founders of Medicare thirty years ago imagined the demographic shape of America that will unfold over the next several decades. Ponder the following:

- With 76 million members, the Baby Boom generation is more than half again as large as the previous generation. To get some idea of how much the number of seniors could grow by the time the youngest Baby Boomers turn seventy, think of the entire population of California and the New England states combined. Or think of it this way: the number of Social Security beneficiaries will at least double by the year 2040.
- In 1900 only one in twenty-five Americans was over sixty-five. The vast majority of these people were completely self-supporting or supported by their families. By 2040 one out of every four or five Americans will be over sixty-five, and the vast majority will be supported to some degree by government entitlements.
- In 1960 there were 5.1 taxpaying workers to support each Social Security beneficiary. Today there are 3.3. By 2040 there will be no more than 2.0—and perhaps as few as 1.6.
- The number of "young old" (sixty-five to sixty-nine) will

BY 2040 THE FIGURE WILL BE ONE IN FOUR OR FIVE.

roughly double over the next half century, but the number of "old old" (eighty-five and over) is expected to triple or quadruple—adding the equivalent of an entire New York City of over-eighty-five-year-olds to the population. Nearly three quarters of those over eighty-five will be single, divorced, or widowed—the groups most likely to need extensive government assistance.

- In 1970 children under five outnumbered Americans aged eighty-five and over by twelve to one. By 2040 the number of old old will equal the number of preschool children, according to some forecasts.
- The extraordinary growth of the old old population will add especially to federal health costs. This is because the average annual medical-care bill rises along a steep curve for older age groups. The ratio of Medicare and Medicaid spending on the old old to spending on the young old is about 2.5 to 1.
- In 2030 only about 15 percent of the over-sixty-five population will be nonwhite. But about 25 percent of younger Americans will be nonwhite. This will create a potentially explosive situation in which largely white senior Boomers will be increasingly reliant on overtaxed minority workers.
- In order to provide the same average number of years of retirement benefits in 2030 that were contemplated when Social Security was set up, in the 1930s, the retirement age would have to be raised from sixty-five to seventy-four by 2030. But this projection—daunting as it is—assumes that future gains in longevity will slow as average life expectancy approaches the supposed "natural limit" to the human life-span. Many experts now question whether such a limit really exists. Summing up research at the National Institute on Aging, the demographer James Vaupel goes so far as to suggest that we are now on the threshold of a "new paradigm of aging," in which the *average* life expectancy could reach 100 or more.

Of course, the United States is not the only country facing an "age wave." Indeed, the age waves in most industrial countries are approaching faster than ours, and—to judge by official projections—could have an even worse impact on their countries' economies and public budgets. But these other countries enjoy long-term defenses that we lack. Unlike the United States, most can actually budget their public spending on health care, and so have much greater control over this potentially explosive dimension of senior dependency. Unlike the United States, most generally tax public benefits as they do any other income. And unlike the United States, most have fairly healthy household savings rates (generally well over 10 percent of disposable income, as compared with about five percent here), and so can absorb public-sector deficits much better than we can.

Most important, unlike the United States, these other countries are unencumbered by the illusion that their people have some sort of inalienable right to live the last third of their adult lives in subsidized leisure. In other countries what

government gives can be taken back if doing so is deemed to be in the public's long-term interest. In 1986, when Japan enacted a major reduction in future pension benefits, the Ministry of Health and Welfare issued a concise justification that cited "equity between the generations." Few if any objections were heard. In a statement issued the day he assumed office, Japan's new Prime Minister, Ryutaro Hashimoto, referred to the "imminent arrival of our Aging Society" as a priority imperative. Citing much longer life-spans and a much reduced fertility rate, he told the Diet in his opening speech that Japan would have to "overhaul those social arrangements premised upon a life-span of twoscore and ten to suit our new expected life-span of fourscore." Do we recall any American President ever making such a statement at *any* point in his term, let alone in the equivalent of an inaugural address?

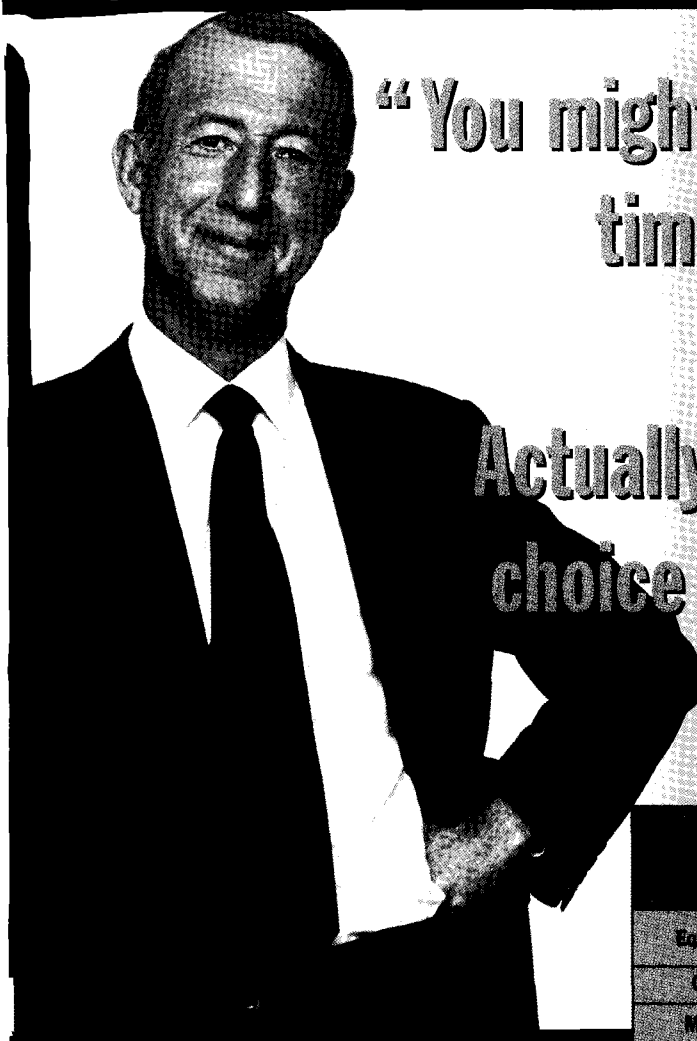
Australia has made employee pensions mandatory, increasing coverage from under 40 percent to nearly 90 percent of the work force. Iceland has means-tested its social-insurance system. Germany has enacted, and France, Sweden, Italy, and the United Kingdom are debating, increases in the retirement age. Some of these changes have provoked fierce controversy—or even widespread protest, as happened in France last winter. But the disagreement is almost always over how best to allocate public resources. No one questions that government has the right to reduce benefits.

Even many developing countries with populations still much younger than our own are preparing for their demographic future with astonishing resolution. In South Korea the household savings rate runs at about 35 percent; "Working to make a better life for the next generation" is a typical company motto. Account balances in Singapore's Central Provident Fund—the country's mandatory pension-savings system—now total nearly three quarters of GDP. In Chile the average worker owns \$21,000 worth of assets in the fifteen-year-old national funded retirement system—a sum about four times the average annual Chilean wage. Argentina, Peru, and Colombia are following Chile's lead and setting up funded systems of their own. Here, nothing has been saved in any national retirement system for any worker to own.

UNSUSTAINABLE PROMISES

THE economist—and sometime humorist—Herbert Stein once said, "If something is unsustainable, it tends to stop." Or, as the old adage advises, "If your horse dies, we suggest you dismount."

We cannot sustain the unsustainable. Nor can we finance the unfinanceable. By 2013, when Baby Boomers will be retiring en masse, the annual surplus of Social Security tax revenues over outlays will turn negative. By 2030, when all the Boomers will have reached sixty-five, Social Security alone will be running an *annual* cash deficit of \$766 billion.



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If Medicare Hospital Insurance is included, and if both programs continue according to current law, the combined cash deficit that year will be \$1.7 trillion. The horse, in other words, will be quite dead. By 2040 the deficit will probably hit \$3.2 trillion, and by 2050, \$5.7 trillion. Even discounting inflation, the deficit that year for these two senior programs will come to approximately \$700 *billion*—four times the size of the entire 1996 federal deficit. Long before that time we will have had no choice but to dismount.

Wall Street has yet to react to these obviously unfinanceable numbers. When will it? Since financial markets try to anticipate events, the reaction will surely come years before the first Boomers start retiring on Social Security, in 2008. How severe will the reaction be? Should the markets conclude that America has lost any chance to deal with this challenge in advance, we will almost certainly see a full-scale economic emergency as interest rates roar into outer space.

Apologists for the status quo dismiss these numbers as “mere projections.” So let me emphasize that the numbers I have used for Social Security and Medicare are *official* projections, calculated by federal actuaries and economists working for the Social Security and Health Care Financing Administrations. The same experts also calculate an alternate and much worse “high-cost” projection, which has historically proved to be more accurate than the forecasts I have used here. Moreover, the retirement and medical-care needs of the Boomer generation are by no means hypothetical. The Social Security Administration’s former chief actuary A. Haeworth Robertson points out that fully 96 percent of senior benefits payable over the next seventy-five years will go to people who are already alive (and therefore countable) today.

Well, say the skeptics, if we can’t borrow trillions of dollars, maybe we can raise taxes a bit and muddle through. But this isn’t a viable option either. Let’s start with the political fact that both parties in Washington are currently hawking a tax *cut*, though they disagree about its size. A tax increase is unmentionable. Then consider the magnitude of the tax increases we would need. By 2040 the cost of Social Security as a share of worker payroll is expected to rise from today’s 11.5 percent to 17 or 22 percent—depending on whether you accept the official or the high-cost projection. Add both parts of Medicare, which currently cost the equivalent of 5.3 percent of payroll but are growing so rapidly that they will eventually overtake and surpass Social Security in size, and we’re talking about 35 to 55 percent of every worker’s paycheck before we even start to pay for the rest of what government does.

Obviously, tax increases of this size would destroy the economy. More to the point, they would kill the taxpayers. There is also the interesting question of whether American

taxpayers could be expected to comply with them. The experience of runaway pension systems in Latin America and Eastern Europe teaches us that when payroll taxes begin even to approach these levels, tax evasion becomes widespread and much of the economy moves into the tax-exempt “gray market.” In other words, it may be impossible to fund the future cost of our current benefit promises no matter how willing we are to legislate higher tax rates.

The senior lobby asserts that whatever the economic consequences, future American workers are duty-bound to fulfill their side of an ill-defined “contract between generations.” Yet one group’s “earned right” to a benefit is another group’s “unearned obligation” to pay a tax. It is to this second group that our children and grandchildren belong. Understandably, they are suspicious of a binding “contract” to which they never agreed. According to a 1994 poll, Americans under thirty-five are much more likely to believe in UFOs than to believe that they’ll ever receive Social Security benefits.

There’s an old adage about robbing Peter to pay Paul. In the entitlement shell game we’re proposing to rob Peter Jr. to pay Peter Sr.—even when the Peter Sr. in question may not need the money. In fact, Peter Jr. is already paying plenty. Because so much of Social Security is tax-free (and because retirees no longer pay FICA taxes), a typical retired couple on Social Security in 1994 with \$30,000 in total cash income paid, on average, only \$790 in federal taxes. Meanwhile, their son and daughter-in-law, struggling to raise a child on the same income, had a total federal tax burden of \$7,035, if you include both the FICA tax they paid and that paid by their employers. No other industrial nation tilts its tax system away from the elderly—or tilts its benefits system toward the elderly—as much as the United States does.

The present system’s true believers dress up Social Security and Medicare in the reassuring rhetoric of “insurance” and “pensions” and claim that beneficiaries are only getting back what they paid in. They’re wrong. The majority of today’s beneficiaries are getting back *far more* than they ever paid in FICA contributions: given an average life expectancy, the average one-earner couple retiring today will get about \$123,000 more out of Social Security than the average earner and his or her employers ever paid into it, plus interest. Omit the employer’s contribution and calculate only the payback on the personal taxes paid by the employee, and the windfall rises to \$173,000. With Medicare thrown in it rises to nearly \$310,000, much of that tax-free. These are not “earned benefits” but unearned windfalls that our children will have to pay for and certainly will never enjoy themselves.

Moreover, since FICA contributions have never been saved by the federal government, the point is moot: regardless of what a worker paid in, the federal trust funds now possess on

HOUSEHOLDS WITH INCOMES THAT ARE ABOVE THE U.S. MEDIAN.

that worker's behalf nothing but claims on future taxpayers. The term "trust fund" may suggest a vault in which one's Social Security taxes are stacked up, to be paid out later. But the Social Security "trust fund" is the ultimate fiscal oxymoron. Its "assets," which we are told will keep the system "solvent" until 2030, consist of nothing more than Treasury IOUs—claims against future generations. When it comes time to redeem these claims and the interest they have accumulated, where will the Treasury find the cash? Either by borrowing from the public or by raising taxes. Either way, absent any policy change future taxpayers will have to pay again for today's Social Security "surplus."

If the Social Security and Medicare balance sheets were evaluated according to private-sector accounting standards, both would be declared disastrously insolvent. How disastrously? Consider that the federal government has already promised to today's adults \$8.3 trillion in future Social Security benefits beyond the value of the taxes they have paid to date—a figure more than 250 times as great as the much-decried "unfunded liabilities" of *all* private-sector pension plans in America! If federal law required Congress to fund Social Security the way private pensions must be funded, the annual federal deficit would instantly rise by some \$675 billion. Add in our lavish and unfunded federal-employee pensions and the deficit would rise by \$800 billion. Add in Medicare and it would rise by more than \$1 trillion. If private-sector executives ran their pension systems this way, they would be thrown in jail for wholesale violation of federal pension-plan regulations.

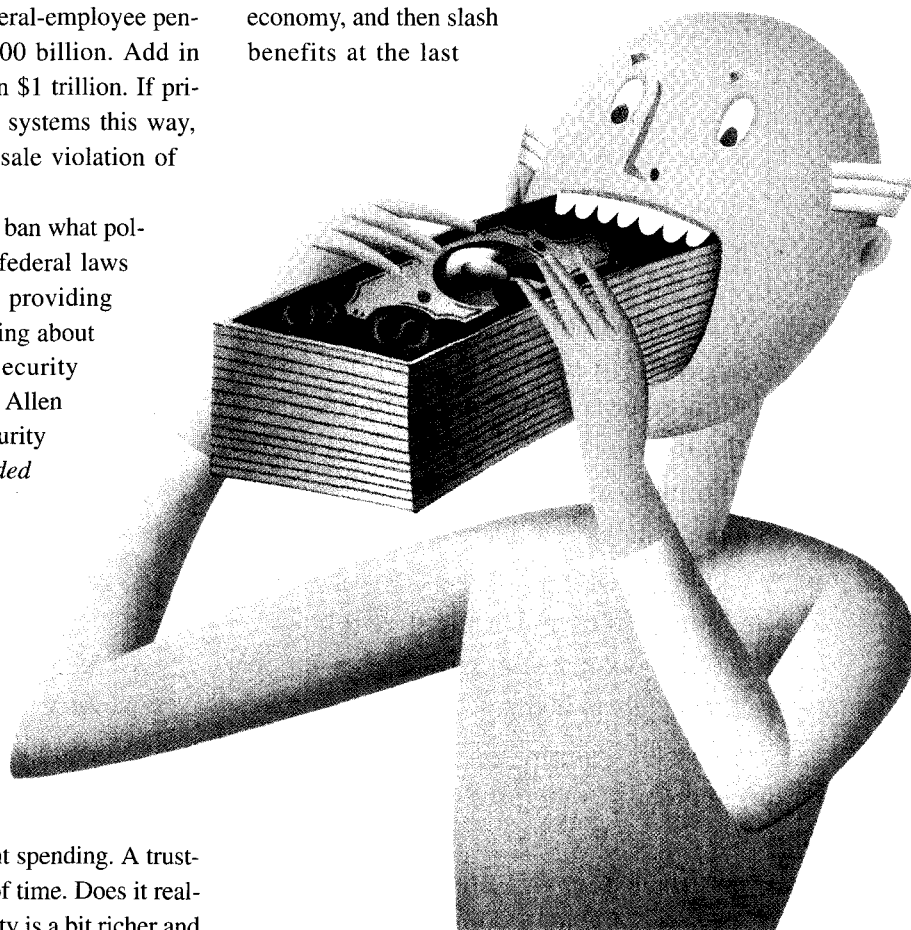
Meanwhile, Congress has attempted to ban what policy wonks call "unfunded mandates"—federal laws that impose costs on the states without providing funding for them. That's fine—but worrying about such mandates while ignoring Social Security and Medicare is like mistaking Woody Allen for Arnold Schwarzenegger. Social Security and Medicare are *the mother of all unfunded mandates*.

It's time to face up to the fact that trust-fund accounting is a hoax, that Social Security is in fact a pay-as-you-go system. Payroll taxes go directly to today's beneficiaries; benefits come directly from today's workers. Since FICA is a tax, and tax revenues are fungible, any annual surplus of FICA taxes over benefits is used to cover other government spending. A trust-fund ledger for such transfers is a waste of time. Does it really help anyone to know that Social Security is a bit richer and

the Treasury is a bit poorer? Given the apparent congressional appetite for constitutional amendments, why not consider one banning government trust funds?

As Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan has summed it up, the only bottom line that really counts is government's total borrowing balance with the public—otherwise known as the annual consolidated budget deficit or budget surplus. Transferring IOUs from the right pocket to the left pocket does nothing to bridge Social Security's and Medicare's enormous funding shortfall.

Along with this melancholy list of fiscal unsustainables we should consider some troubling moral unsustainables. Social Security was established to protect the elderly from indigence late in life—to prevent a "poverty-ridden old age," in the words of Franklin D. Roosevelt. If we allow it to go bankrupt by paying benefits to middle-class and affluent Americans, many of whom can live well enough without these benefits, what will happen to those who really need them? Among Social Security recipients whose incomes are under \$20,000, Social Security accounts for *more than half* of the total. In spite of this sobering dependence, many political leaders imply by their inaction that it's fine to wait until trillion-dollar deficits have devastated our economy, and then slash benefits at the last



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minute. By doing so we would then deprive Americans at all income levels of the chance to plan for their futures. Millions of lower-income beneficiaries would be stranded in what might be called a demographic Depression, as the safety net that Social Security was enacted to provide suddenly vanished. Future historians may record that Social Security's "defenders" were the ones who most wanted to exempt the program from a balanced-budget amendment and thus from gradual and timely reform.

Paul Tsongas likes to say, "It's not enough for our children to love us. We should want them to respect us." When our children look into the Social Security trust fund and find nothing there but IOUs with their own names listed as payers, they will surely wonder how we could have treated them so shabbily.

THE INESCAPABLE BOTTOM LINE

NOTWITHSTANDING its strengths, real and imagined, the U.S. economy since the early 1970s has failed at what matters most: *raising productivity*. Why should the average American care about such a seemingly abstract concept? Because working longer hours—or putting everyone's spouse (or child) to work—is not the way to raise living standards. A higher standard of living means producing more while working the same or a lesser number of hours—in other words, being more productive. Only thus can real (after inflation) hourly compensation and take-home pay rise. The astute economist Paul Krugman once summed it up this way: "Productivity isn't everything, but in the long run it is almost everything. A country's ability to improve its standard of living over time depends almost entirely on its ability to raise its output per worker."

Since the early 1970s real national income per full-time worker (as calculated by the Commerce Department) has grown by approximately 0.4 percent a year. Total worker compensation has grown at about the same meager pace. This rate of growth is so low that a debate rages among economists over whether—after accounting for inflation and the rising costs of employer-paid health care—the typical U.S. worker has seen any perceptible wage growth since 1973.

We can no longer ignore what economists from Adam Smith to Karl Marx to Alfred Marshall to John Maynard Keynes to Paul Samuelson have insisted is the bottom line: sustained productivity growth requires investment, and no country can sustain high rates of investment without saving. These economists all understood that productivity growth depends on many underlying conditions, such as technological innovation and efficient markets, but they all agreed that capital accumulation is essential to productivity growth—and is, moreover, the one condition over which society can exercise direct control. Few experts disagree, especially when "capital"

is defined, as many economists define it, to include such intangible collective investments as infrastructure, research, education, and training. Yet we now face public budgets strained to the breaking point by the costs of demographic aging, which will crowd out all forms of capital accumulation—private and public, material and human. Without fundamental policy reform a graying America cannot be a saving America.

But thrift is precisely what we've forgotten. From an average of 8.1 percent of GDP in the 1960s, the net national savings rate dipped to 7.2 percent in the 1970s and then plunged to 3.9 percent in the 1980s and to 2.3 percent thus far in the 1990s. Net domestic investment has fallen in tandem, from 7.3 percent of GDP in the 1960s to 3.5 percent in the 1990s—a decline that would have been much steeper if we had not switched from investing abroad to borrowing abroad.

Our structural deficits drain our already shallow pool of private savings—and hence crowd out private investment. To the extent that we try to control these deficits by reducing "discretionary" federal spending (a category that includes most future-oriented programs), they also crowd out public investment. Out of every nondefense dollar the federal government now spends, only about five cents builds tangible things that remain after the fiscal year is over. Recently a General Accounting Office study suggested that we must invest \$112 billion to bring the infrastructure of schools back to acceptable levels. But where can we find such a sum when entitlements and interest on old debts crowd out everything else?

Long before the Boomers reach retirement age, we're preparing to cut everything from Head Start and school lunches to rapid transit and space shuttles in order to pay the rising cost of senior entitlements. Despite the radical rhetoric in Washington, the recent budget plans I have seen don't reverse but accelerate our current fiscal trajectory. Each of them proposes to slash appropriated domestic spending in real dollars while only gently restraining the growth in senior entitlements. Even in Congress's plan senior benefits in 2002 would consume still another record share of the budget—nearly 50 percent of noninterest outlays, up from 40 percent today and just 17 percent in 1965. This is in a benign demographic period, when the relatively small Depression generation (born before VJ Day) is still retiring and the relatively large Boomer generation (born after 1945) is still working and paying taxes. And remember: this is the *Republican* plan, widely attacked as a "declaration of war" on America's seniors.

To break out of this slow-growth, low-investment cycle we must set a higher productivity goal and then dedicate the resources required to meet it. A sensible objective would be to increase the rate of growth in real per-worker national income by a percentage point, from the post-1973 average of 0.4 to about 1.5 percent a year. Even this substantial increase would not equal American growth rates of the 1950s and 1960s, or match Japan's record during the 1970s and 1980s. But it would come close to returning U.S. productivity growth to its

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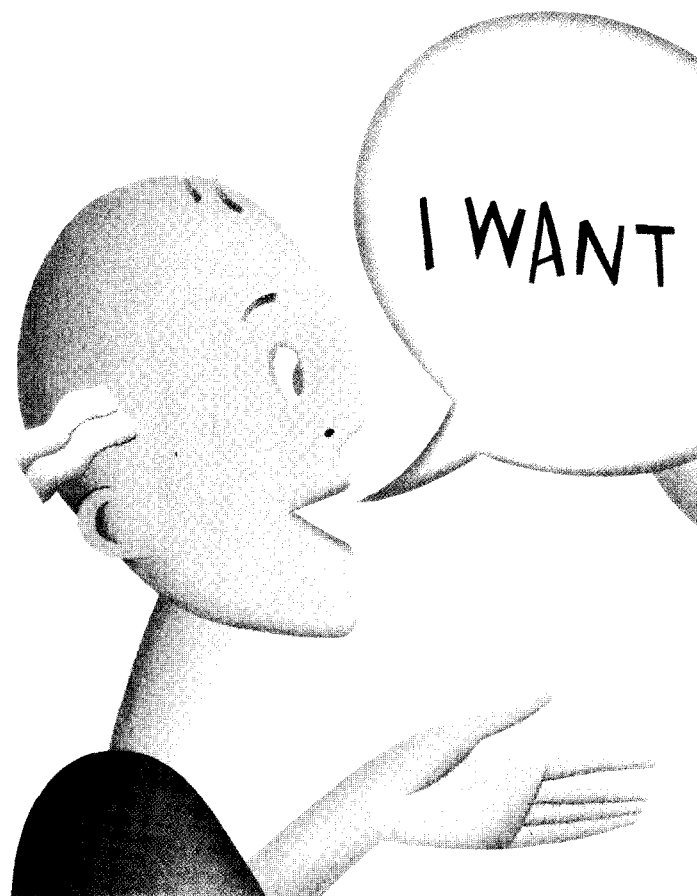
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average rate over the past century—and it would bring growth close to the rates of most of our European competitors. If we raise productivity to 1.5 percent, twenty years from now national income per worker would be nearly \$10,000 higher in today's dollars, and federal revenues (at the same tax rates) would be nearly \$400 billion higher, than will be the case if we continue on our current course.

Conventional economic theory suggests that this ambitious goal requires a shift of six to eight percent of GDP from consumption to savings, giving us a long-term savings and investment rate of about 10 percent of GDP. But where will these extra savings—an average of at least \$4,500 per U.S. household annually—come from? About a third can be financed by balancing the federal budget and keeping it balanced. The rest will have to come from greater private saving.

AMERICA'S SAVINGS GAP

THUS we come to what we Americans as individuals can and must do for ourselves and the nation—ichthyology from the standpoint of the fish. There are four main sources of income for those over the age of sixty-five: continued employment, government benefits, private pension income, and accumulated personal savings.



AMERICANS SEEM TO THINK THEY HAVE AN INALIENABLE RIGHT TO LIVE

As we shall see, the adequacy of each of these sources is uncertain.

When it comes to our retirement plans, we are a nation in denial. About nine out of ten Boomers say they want to retire at or before age sixty-five (about six out of ten before age sixty). More than two thirds say they will be able to live “where they want” and live “comfortably” throughout their retirement years. A stunning 71 percent expect to maintain in retirement a standard of living the same as or better than what they enjoyed during their working years.

Yet probe them more deeply about their retirement dreams, and most Boomers admit that they are terrified that neither they nor their government is saving enough. Some two thirds confess that they’ve never even calculated how much they need to save for their retirement, and an amazing 86 percent acknowledge that “future retirees will face a personal financial crisis 20 years from now.” Yet at the same time, they do not expect or even want much from government. Nearly nine out of ten Boomers agree that “the government has made financial promises to [their] generation that it will not be able to keep.” For every Boomer who says that government should shoulder the “main responsibility for providing retirement income,” five say that individuals should. They will very likely get their wish. From all the numbers we have seen, it is obvious that government

retirement benefits (mainly Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid) are likely to be severely reduced by the time most Boomers retire.

What could take their place? Thirty years ago experts hoped that private pensions would become a universal supplement to Social Security. Such hopes never panned out. Today less than half of all U.S. private-sector workers are covered by pensions. Overall coverage has been flat since the early 1970s, and in recent years coverage has actually dropped sharply for younger men. This stems from long-term changes in the work force and in the nature of work—part-time work, working at home, multiple careers. Rates of pension coverage have always been highest for full-time career jobs, unionized jobs, and jobs in government and large corporations—in short, for jobs that are becoming increasingly scarce. As for Americans lucky enough to have pensions, they will be surprised, if not seriously disappointed, by how little their plans have set aside for them: the typical defined-benefit pension plan for average-earning workers with thirty years of service replaces just one third of pre-retirement earnings—an amount that is not indexed for inflation.

Clearly, retiring Boomers will have to rely heavily on the remaining source of retirement income: private savings apart from pensions. But this source may be the most un-



median savings are still shy of \$10,000. Even optimists admit that a bleak future awaits the approximately one third of all Boomers who are expected neither to accumulate financial assets nor to receive a private pension.

Ironically, the Baby Boom is the best-educated, most sophisticated, most well-traveled generation in our history. This irony provides still another illustration of the depth of our denial.

B. Douglas Bernheim, of Stanford University, concludes that Boomers on average must *triple* their current saving if they want to enjoy an undiminished living standard in retirement. And if one assumes a 35 percent reduction in Social Security benefits (which seems more than likely if not inevitable), then Boomers will have to *quintuple* their saving. A recent study by the Committee for Economic Development, *Who Will Pay for Your Retirement? The Looming Crisis*, comes to a similarly stark conclusion.

If it's true that the promise of late-in-life government benefits helped to suppress private savings in the past, maybe the growing expectation of cuts in government benefits will help to boost private savings in the future. Though economic theorists debate the point, people do take government subsidies into account when deciding how much to save. By thirteen to one, households say that they would

THE LAST THIRD OF THEIR ADULT LIVES IN SUBSIDIZED LEISURE.

certain of all, for it is questionable whether the average American is saving *anything* on his own: what one household saves in a bank account or a nonpension mutual fund scarcely offsets what another household borrows. Whenever the stock market or housing prices rise, many households may feel that they're saving enough. But our aggregate personal-savings rate, except for pensions, is now barely positive.

Many have argued that the current bust is attributable to the passage of so many Baby Boomers through the years of household formation, and that saving will turn up again as Boomers reach the traditionally high-saving middle years. But for this explanation to be valid, the personal-savings rate should have bottomed out by the mid-1980s—and climbed back again. Many Boomers have already entered the traditionally peak saving years. But the savings decline persists, contrary to predictions of a demographic reversal.

In 1992, according to the Federal Reserve Board, 43 percent of U.S. families spent more than their income; only 30 percent accumulated assets for long-term saving. In 1993, according to a Merrill Lynch analysis of Census Bureau data, half of all families had less than \$1,000 in net financial assets—a figure that had not risen over the previous decade, even in nominal dollars. Among adults in their late fifties, the age at which workers are staring directly at retirement,

save more if they knew that future Social Security benefits were going to be cut.

Finally there is the prospect of inheritance, that magic cure-all for any generation's retirement worries. In recent years Boomers have been cheered by a spate of upbeat stories about the "\$10 trillion inheritance boom" that today's affluent seniors are expected to pass on. These Boomers may not have noticed the bumper stickers one sees in resort areas frequented by seniors: I'M SPENDING MY CHILDREN'S INHERITANCE. But even if the hoped-for hand-off takes place, there's a problem. Because this wealth is highly concentrated among relatively few families (what Donald Trump calls the "Lucky Sperm Club"), bequests may *average* as much as \$90,000 per Boomer but will amount to only about \$30,000 for the median Boomer. Muffy and Duffy will do fine, but for most of this generation the typical inheritance will just about cover the costs of settling Dad's estate and pay off a few lingering medical bills.

Dan Yankelovich, the dean of American opinion surveyors, has wisely said that our collective denial is not due to emotional or moral pathology. Rather, it is a case of "cognitive denial," by which he means a failure to make connections between how we prefer to see reality and what reality actually is. Clearly, this denial is manifest at the national level and at the personal level.

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PRAYING FOR PRODUCTIVITY AND OTHER GOOD THINGS

ARE there any favorable trends under way that might moderate these bleak forecasts? Perhaps. But there is less to them than meets the eye. First, consider productivity growth, which determines real wage growth and hence tomorrow's tax base. Those who preach that high tech will bail us out and that we can avoid saving and investing our way back to economic growth tell us not to worry: we're in the midst of a productivity revolution. But we have good reason to worry. For one thing, after the Commerce Department recently updated its methodology, it became clear that the much-touted productivity gains of the 1990s are just about typical of earlier business-cycle recoveries over the past twenty-five years. For another, the Social Security Administration's best estimate of future deficits presupposes a permanent one-third improvement in productivity over our actual historical record since 1973. In other words, productivity growth will have to accelerate simply to ensure that the future isn't *worse* than the SSA's already unsustainable official projection. It would have to accelerate still more to ensure that things turn out better.

Well, if the productivity revolution—at least as it is now unfolding—won't save us, maybe the new baby “boomlet” will. It's true that current fertility rates, of about 2.0 to 2.1 lifetime births per woman, are a bright spot when compared with the low rates of 1.7 to 1.9 recorded during the “birth dearth” of the 1970s and 1980s. But even if these higher fertility rates turn out to be lasting, they won't have much effect on federal tax revenues until the mid-2020s—long after fiscal meltdown is scheduled to occur. Even then the positive impact will be small. To stabilize the ratio of retirees to workers, U.S. fertility would have to surge to 3.0 or higher—in other words, back to the Baby Boom levels of the 1950s and early 1960s, which no one expects. For one thing, the share of American women who say that a family of four or more children is “ideal” has plummeted from nearly 50 percent to about 10 percent since the 1950s. For another, the United States already has one of the highest fertility rates in the developed world. Average fertility in other major industrial countries is now 1.6; in Germany and Italy it is 1.3.

Well, then, if not babies, what about immigrants? Isn't importing more young workers a viable solution to America's aging? Again, not really. Immigrants, too, eventually grow old—and thus begin adding to Social Security and Medicare costs. To make a substantial dent in the costs of America's aging, huge and destabilizing waves of immigration would be required. In fact, to cancel out the projected growth in the Social Security payroll-tax rate over the next half century, today's level of net immigration would have to roughly quintuple, to about five million a year, beginning now. The reality, of course, is that America is in no mood to reopen Ellis Island.

Finally, consider health-care spending. Some point to the recent slowdown in medical-*price* inflation (as measured by the Consumer Price Index) and conclude that our problem is behind us. Not so. First, what matters is total *expenditures* on health care, and thus far in the 1990s real federal health-benefit outlays have not slowed at all. Second (and once again), the bleak official projections *already* assume a dramatic turnaround in recent trends. Over the past quarter century real Medicare spending per beneficiary has increased at the rate of five percent a year—several times as fast as real per capita income growth. Over no five-year period since 1970 has the growth in spending been less than three percent a year. Yet the Health Care Financing Administration's official projection assumes that the growth in real per-beneficiary Medicare spending will slow to about one percent a year by 2020. This projected cost-containment “triumph” is timed to occur just as aging Baby Boomers begin to increase the demand for every imaginable health-care service.

So let's hope—or pray—for productivity gains, higher fertility rates, and market-imposed discipline on health-care costs. But let's not forget the rosy scenarios of the 1980s that never came true and the problems we never grew our way out of. Public policy must be based on prudent expectations about the future—and prudence suggests that on our current trajectory the future may be worse than the bleak official forecasts.

No matter how clearly Social Security actuaries tell us that financial trouble looms ahead, politicians on both sides of the aisle are convinced that “middle-class” entitlement programs constitute the “third rail” of American politics: “Touch it and you're toast.” So denial persists. It would be pleasant to blame this denial on Washington and say that the rest of us know better—that all we have to do is elect more-principled public servants who will dare to confront these issues. But the problem is interactive—the politicians and the people have all become gifted deniers.

Consider this irony: the public enthusiasm for budget balancing and cuts in “wasteful” programs is inversely proportional to the cost of those programs. Ninety-four percent of those polled in one recent survey favored slashing foreign aid, 77 percent wanted to cut public-housing funds, and 75 percent wanted to cut the space program. Yet these programs together make up only about three percent of the federal budget. Meanwhile, only 14 percent of respondents wanted to cut Social Security, and only 22 percent favored cutting Medicare. Yet these two programs together account for a staggering one third of the budget.

Or consider how we deny the truth about entitlement programs. In justifying every new benefit increase and every refusal to accept slower growth in expenditures for the elderly, the senior lobby talks as if “old” meant “poor.” But elderly Americans now have the highest level of per capita household wealth of any age group—and, counting in-kind income such as health benefits, a lower poverty rate than

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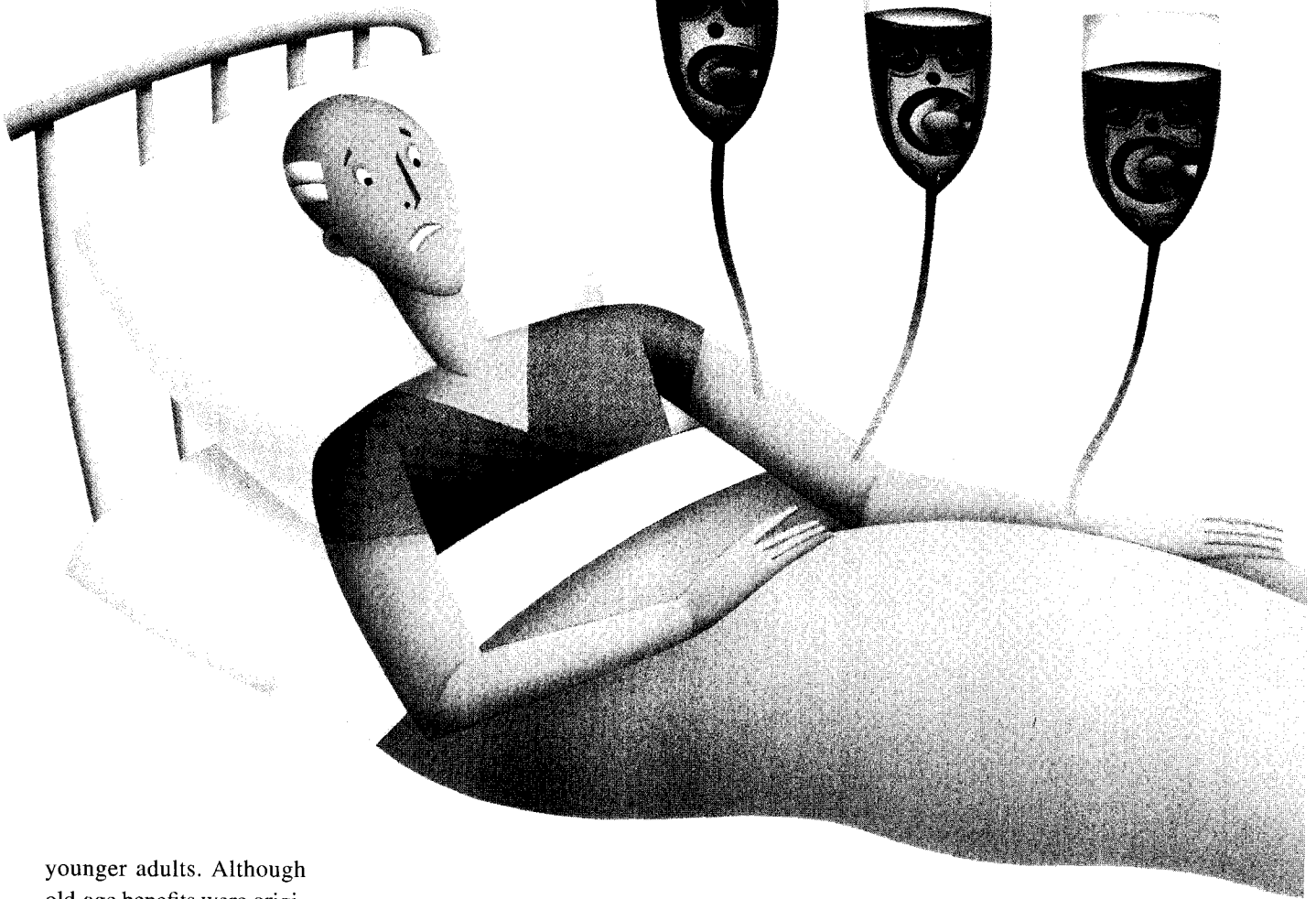


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younger adults. Although old-age benefits were originally intended to be a safety net for the truly needy, today's entitlement system more closely resembles a well-padded hammock for middle- and upper-class retirees. One third of Medicare benefits, nearly two fifths of Social Security benefits, and more than two thirds of federal pension benefits now go to households with incomes above the U.S. median. Back in the early 1960s the typical seventy-year-old consumed about 30 percent less (in dollars) than the typical thirty-year-old; today the typical seventy-year-old consumes nearly 20 percent more.

It is obvious that this senior affluence is not evenly distributed. Millions of seniors would be destitute without federal benefits. There is also no guarantee that this affluence will continue for future generations of elders, which is why Boomers must prepare for their own retirement now. Households that are not saving enough must confront and act on their retirement-income needs. In a recent study Public Agenda found that only 20 percent of U.S. households are "planners" who deliberately save toward a quantitative goal. The rest—"strugglers," "impulsives," and "deniers"—leave their future more or less to fate.

Younger Americans need to understand how great a change in saving behavior is required, but that this change will hardly be unbearable *if they start now*. Thanks to compound interest, even small sacrifices count. A recent study published in *Fortune* magazine found that if a couple at age forty decide to go out to dinner and a movie only twice a month instead of four times, and put the savings into a 401K plan, they will net \$169,500 for their retirement at sixty-five. Paying off credit-card bills when they come in instead of incurring finance charges will yield another \$121,400.

But if Boomers don't start providing personally for their retirement, then their golden years will hold nothing like the life of leisure that most of them seem to expect. In *The Retirement Myth*, Craig Karpel warns that the generation we met in the 1980s as "yuppies" may reappear around 2020 as "dumpies"—destitute, unprepared mature people wandering the streets with signs reading WILL WORK FOR MEDICINE.

**COMING
TRANSFORMATIONS**

MODERN Americans are inverse Victorians. The Victorians, of course, were famous for their prudishness about sex. But they were loquacious in planning for their old age and eventual death. A dignified death and a proud cemetery site represented important social values. Their detailed wills were a boon to Britain's legal profession. We are just the opposite: We will talk to almost anyone and say almost anything about our sexual experiences. Yet we deal with aging and mortality as reluctantly as the Victorians dealt with sex.

Because we have difficulty talking about our collective aging, the social, cultural, and economic transformations that will be caused by it will come as a shock and a surprise to many of us. "Shake the windows and rattle the walls"

is what Bob Dylan wrote about Baby Boomers when they first came of age. My purpose

in this essay is to suggest how aging Boomers might shake the windows and rattle the walls of our society one more time.

The Retirement Transformation

As recently as 1950 most men who were physically capable of doing so continued to work past the age of sixty-five; fully a third of those aged seventy and up were still in the labor force. Today just 16 percent of elderly men work. This

trend toward early retirement is no longer affordable. Moreover, given the growing number of Americans who reach the late sixties and seventies in good health and with valuable skills, it is no longer enlightened social policy.

As Robert Butler, a former director of the National Institute on Aging, puts it, America must develop a new vision of "productive aging" in which "work expectancy" increases along with "life expectancy." We seek satisfying love and sex after sixty—why not satisfying work as well? The old idea of a rocking-chair retirement is dead, and it is time for the new idea of an active yet aimless and dependent retirement to die as well.

The open question is when and how this transformation will occur. Should we change the Social Security retirement age to sixty-eight? seventy? seventy-two? When will we tell those who will be affected, so that they can begin to adjust their life plans? And how will employers keep so many se-

niors on the payroll? What private-sector management and training programs will make senior employees more attractive? How are we going to change the perverse Social Security incentives that discourage seniors from remaining in (or re-entering) the work force? What jobs will best suit seniors who continue working, and how can we maximize their availability? How do we revamp traditional career patterns to allow for semi-retirement, phased retirement, and "un-retirement"?

The Health Transformation

On the eve of the New Deal all levels of government spent roughly \$1.00 annually on health care for the typical older American. By 1965 the figure had risen to roughly \$100, by 1975 to roughly \$1,000, and by 1995 to roughly \$7,000. Thirty years ago America spent more on national defense than it did on health care. Health care is expected to consume 18 percent of GDP by 2005—at least five times what we are likely to spend on defense. And that's before the special multipliers of the age wave—especially the huge growth in the old old, who are most likely to require extensive acute and chronic care—even begin to kick in.

Americans prefer to believe that high and rising health-care costs are primarily the result of waste, fraud, and abuse. If only we got rid of all the unnecessary tests and treatments, or slashed the excessive paperwork, or got tough on Medicaid cheats and profiteering drug companies, then presto, the problem would be solved. But experts know that the real causes are far more intractable: fabulous (and fabulously expensive) new medical technologies, cost-blind benefit and insurance systems that exempt most Americans from having to make choices about treatment, and the American tendency to disdain limits, including the ultimate limit—death itself.

Heirs of Ponce de León, in search of the Fountain of Youth? Perhaps that's too harsh. But no other country switches on multimillion-dollar MRI scanners for routine complaints (we have eight times as many MRI units per capita as Canada), commits terminally ill patients to intensive-care units, or performs heart bypasses on septuagenarians at anywhere near the rates we do. Americans, a European once observed, like to think everything is an option—even death.

The problem is that it is almost impossible to pinpoint aspects of our lavish style of medicine that are "wasteful" in the sense that they are of absolutely no medical benefit. Little of what physicians do is based on certain knowledge of the outcome; most involves judgment calls about unknown probabilities. Henry Aaron, the director of the economic-studies program for the Brookings Institution, speaks for most thoughtful observers when he writes that "sustained reductions in the growth of health-care spending can be achieved only if some beneficial care is denied to some people."

In the end the long gray wave will leave us no choice but to rethink what we mean by health. Is it a consumer good that can be purchased on demand at the doctor's office, or is it a lifelong investment? Should that investment be a personal choice, or should it be regarded as a public duty? How much should government be responsible for health care and how much should individuals? Most important, what share of public resources do we wish to spend on health care for ourselves, and how much do we wish to dedicate to such economic and social goals as productivity-enhancing R&D and a better education for our children?

No other transformation presents such profound ethical questions. Who will decide what costly heart transplants and similar death-defying high-tech operations are appropriate for the growing elderly population, especially the burgeoning old old group? When, and how, will society determine that even if an eighty-five-year-old can enjoy another year of life through an expensive high-tech intervention, this may be the wrong value to pursue—especially when so many children lack even basic health-care coverage?

The Youth Transformation

In an aging America everything will depend on the skills, education, productivity, and civic good will of younger generations—for their labor must support the elderly. Yet nothing seems less obvious than their capacity to rise to the challenge we are passing on to them. They will be relatively few in number. They will inherit a huge national debt and a high and rising payroll-tax burden. To make matters worse, many more of these future adults than today's adults are growing up in families, neighborhoods, and schools plagued by economic hardship and social dysfunction.

Since 1973 the real median income of households headed by adults aged sixty-five and over has risen by more than 25 percent, while the real median income of households under age thirty-five has fallen more than 10 percent. Counting all sources of income, poverty in America is three times as likely to afflict the very young as the very old. The United States is the global leader in the life expectancy of eighty-five-year-olds but has fallen near the bottom of the industrial world's rankings in rates of infant mortality, marital breakup, child poverty, child suicide, hours of school-assigned homework, and functional illiteracy. Meanwhile, per capita federal spending on the elderly towers eleven to one over federal spending on children. The appropriate response to the outrageous is to be outraged, yet we seem oblivious of this devastating disproportion.

How can we remain an economic superpower when nearly a third of our children are born out of wedlock and few of their fathers are willing to assume legal, financial, and moral responsibility for them? How will America prosper in a competitive technological and information-based global economy when its children grow up to exhibit school-dropout rates

and rates of functional illiteracy that are among the highest in the industrial world? How do we answer Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan's haunting question: "Will we be the first species that forgets how to raise our young?" Or, to paraphrase Churchill, "Have we ever asked so much from so few, having done so little to prepare them for their burdens?"

We're talking not about physical capital but about human and social capital: the intact families, work habits, education, and high-tech skills upon which any hope of increasing productivity ultimately rests. If we are going to rely on just 1.6 to 2.0 workers to support every retiree, as the SSA forecasts suggest, we should want today's children to become the best educated, most skilled, and most productive citizens imaginable. How does that square with our current rush to cut discretionary spending and defund social programs, from Head Start to vocational schools, that have long provided education and training? How can we generate the funding and the political support to educate our young in today's overburdened economy? How can we make the twenty-first century the century for our children?

The Political Transformation

Today's seniors, represented by powerful lobbies and voting in disproportionate numbers compared with the young, are already a potent political force. Will the rapid growth in the number of elderly enthrone the senior lobby as an invincible political titan? Or will the young, who must pay for tomorrow's senior benefits, find their political voice while there's still time to do something about it? Averting a destructive conflict between the generations will require a political transformation. But how can the young be encouraged to participate more aggressively in the political process? How do we merge the public interests of young and old and show how dangerous it is for them to become adversaries?

The Global Transformation

I recently asked the head of Japan's Central Bank why Japan has resisted America's requests to cut its budget surplus and stimulate consumer demand. His immediate response was "Because Japan must save so that it can afford its coming retirement wave"—a warning that the abundant and relatively inexpensive supply of foreign capital we have depended on for many years may soon disappear. The banker's reply underscores the high priority that some other industrial nations assign to the economics of aging populations.

Americans have paid little attention, but since 1980 roughly a third of net U.S. domestic investment has been funded by foreign creditors. Although some have expressed concern over how these capital inflows must give rise to a permanent annual debt-service charge on our national income, virtually no one has pointed out a more alarming prospect: not that the inflows will continue but that they could slow substantially as aging populations in other industrial countries consume more

of their national income and savings at home. If America cannot boost its domestic savings rate within the next decade, we may enter an era of rising real interest rates, capital rationing, and a forcible curtailment of domestic investment.

There is also the issue of our relation to the less-developed world. When half the population in the United States is over forty, half the population in some emerging markets of Latin America and Asia may still be under twenty-five. Will the current distinction between rich and poor nations gradually come to be seen as a difference between old and young nations? Will the former be characterized by creative consumption, short time horizons, and the defense of the global status quo, while the latter, mainly in Asia and Latin America, become known for energetic investment, long time horizons, and revolutionary changes in the global balance of power? Will the newly democratizing economies of the former Soviet bloc be deprived of the foreign investment they need? Or, alternatively, will a high-saving Third World be exporting capital to a low-saving First World—an ironic turnabout of the policy recommendations of the 1970s? How will these demographic and economic shifts affect global institutions such as the United Nations, the OECD, and the World Trade Organization? Will they effectively address the myriad issues associated with the global age wave and enormous unfunded retirement liabilities?

TURNING AMERICA FROM CONSUMPTION AND DEFICITS TO SAVING AND INVESTMENT: WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE

TO argue in favor of thrift is sometimes enough to earn one the label “declinist”—a person who believes that America’s best days may be over. This is not my view. Still, I want to explain why, if we do not face up to the economic and social challenges ahead, America will age prematurely and perhaps enter a precipitous decline. I do not believe it is un-American to suggest that we live in a finite world, that some desires can’t be satisfied, and that bad choices can lead to tragic outcomes. On the other hand, some good choices—eminently feasible, gradual, and humane choices—can provide a sound future for all of us.

In an era crowded with social “crises”—from race to class—it may seem presumptuous to say that here we have a “real” problem that deserves our full attention. But let there be no doubt: the economic implications of America’s aging population over the next several decades will dwarf, in sheer dollars, any other big issue one might name. Indeed, how we deal with the entitlement and savings crisis may determine how the other issues we face will ultimately play out.

If my analysis so far is correct, we are heading for a major crisis for which our society is unprepared. But our political

leaders cannot be expected to take this challenge seriously unless we as individuals do so as well. A program of thrift thus has to work on all fronts, from the halls of Congress to our homes. Here are some workable steps.

1. Achieve and guarantee long-term budget balance by the year 2002. A campaign to boost saving must start with the federal budget, which can no longer be a borrower but must be a saver. Of all the policy choices directly available to American voters, none would do a more reliable—and faster—job of raising the national savings rate than eliminating our chronic deficits. I believe that we should achieve budget balance no later than 2002—a date, happily, around which a bipartisan consensus has finally emerged, after considerable Republican pressure. The reforms we make, moreover, should, at least provisionally, guarantee long-term budget balance *after* 2002—not just temporary balance *in* 2002.

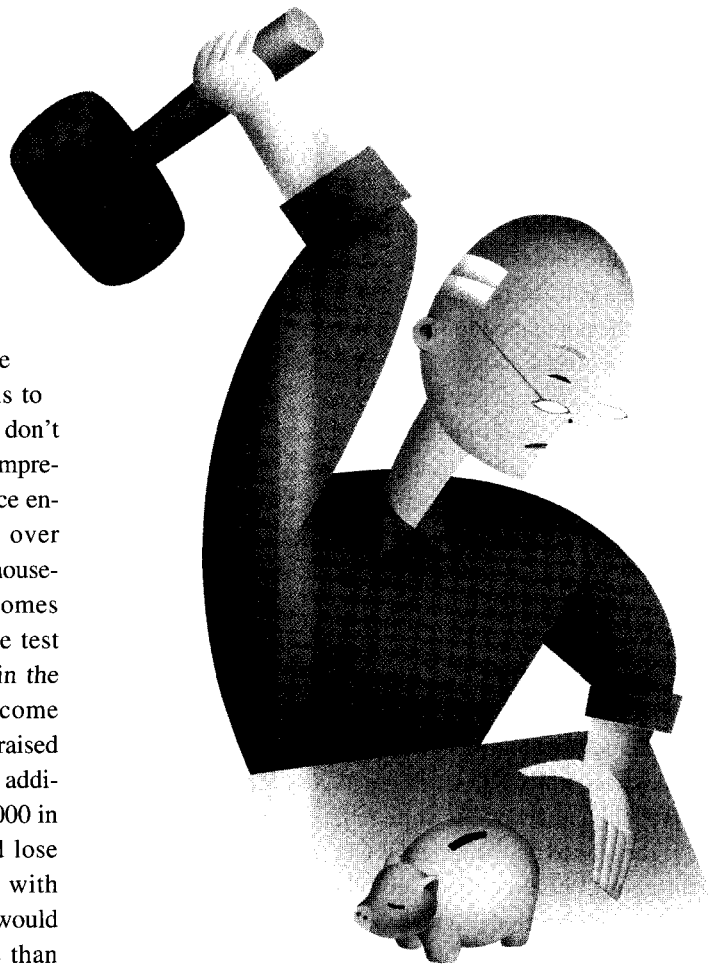
The federal deficit is now 2.4 percent of GDP. Over the past thirty years the United States—along with every other major industrial nation—has repeatedly achieved this degree of public-sector deficit reduction in fewer than seven years. Moreover, since the federal deficit is projected to grow rapidly *after* the year 2002, a longer timetable would only make the long-term effort more difficult. Balancing the budget, starting now, is like running to catch a train that’s leaving the station. To catch it in two minutes we would have to run harder than we would to catch it in one minute.

Some experts worry that this is not the right time in the business cycle to initiate a balanced-budget plan. But according to these critics, it may never be the right time. So long as reforms are phased in gradually over seven years, there is little danger that a shift from consumption to saving will seriously depress the economy. Indeed, a credible budget plan might boost the economy if—as many economists, including Alan Greenspan, think likely—the markets react by lowering interest rates, particularly long-term rates, by two percent.

But mere budget balance is too timid a goal. Given the shortage of our national savings, I believe that Congress should aim for a federal budget *surplus* of perhaps one or two percent of GDP through the first two decades of the next century, to make up for our recent profligacy and, more important, to lay up stores during the Boomers’ peak earning years for the sudden burden that will accompany their retirement. Or, better, Congress could aim for a smaller surplus but substantially increase spending on targeted public investments in education, worker training, and research and development—the kind of human-infrastructure investment that is essential to an information-age economy, but in which we are now sorely deficient. Either way, we would radically change federal budgeting. We would no longer presume on the good will of our children but would demonstrate our good will toward them by moderating excess consumption, which makes us net takers, in favor of investment, which unites us as net givers.

2. Reform entitlement programs. Trying to achieve long-term budget balance without reforming entitlements is like trying to clean out the garage without removing the Winnebago. The following reforms, taken together, would put these programs in long-term sustainable balance well into the twenty-first century.

- *Subject all federal benefits to an “affluence test.”* The first sensible step toward long-term budget balance is to scale back entitlement subsidies flowing to people who don’t need them. To this end I recommend that we enact a comprehensive “affluence test” that would progressively reduce entitlement benefits to all households with incomes over \$40,000—or more than \$5,000 above the U.S. median household income for 1996. Households with lower incomes would retain all government benefits. The affluence test would be applied *annually*—protecting the elderly in the event of an unexpected loss of income. Higher-income households would lose 10 percent of all benefits that raised their income above \$40,000, and 10 percent for each additional \$10,000 in income. Thus a household with \$50,000 in total income and \$10,000 in federal benefits would lose \$1,000, or 10 percent of its benefits; a household with \$100,000 in income and the same \$10,000 in benefits would lose \$6,000, or 60 percent; a household with more than



WE MUST PUT ASIDE THE “ENTITLEMENT ETHIC” AND RETURN TO THI

\$120,000 in income would lose \$8,500, or 85 percent—the maximum benefit-withholding rate. (This 15 percent exemption would ensure that even today’s most affluent beneficiaries continue to enjoy a respectable tax-free return on their personal FICA contributions.) All income brackets would be indexed for inflation.

Because the test would leave in place all benefits to lower-income households, the original “floor-of-protection” intention of nearly all federal benefits programs would continue to apply. Because such a large share of entitlements now goes to middle- and upper-income Americans (nearly 40 percent of Social Security payments go to recipients with incomes above the U.S. median), savings would be large and would compound as the population aged and the number of beneficiaries grew. Indeed, it is estimated that by 2040 *annual* savings would amount to more than \$550 billion. Finally, because the test would also be comprehensive, covering not just Social Security and Medicare but everything from farm aid to federal pensions to veterans’ benefits, this plan would not pit one special-interest constituency against another.

Since this affluence test was first proposed, in my book *Facing Up*, it has attracted considerable interest from both Democrats and Republicans. It has also elicited criticism from those who for various reasons don’t want entitlements

reformed. Some have said that an affluence test would constitute a tax on savings, and thus would discourage thrift. There is no evidence to support this hypothesis. More important, it ignores the larger issue—which is how to increase national savings. Any decline in private saving caused by an affluence test would be dwarfed by the decline in benefit outlays—which in turn would translate dollar for dollar into smaller deficits and greater net national savings.

It has also been said that an affluence test would undermine public support for Social Security and other universal social-insurance programs. The theory seems to be that we must bribe the affluent in order to ensure political support for benefits for the needy. This is dead wrong. Of all major proposals to reform entitlements, affluence testing receives the greatest public support. According to a recent opinion poll by the Concord Coalition—a group that I helped to form in 1992, along with the former senators Warren Rudman and Paul Tsongas—67 percent of those asked would support reductions in Social Security benefits to higher-income households, and 77 percent would support reductions in Medicare benefits. Even majorities of older and of affluent households support such a reform.

- *Raise the eligibility age for full benefits.* Congress has already raised the Social Security full-benefit retirement age

from sixty-five to sixty-seven, to be phased in from 2000 to 2027. This is a step in the right direction (although most Americans are not aware of it), but the step is too small and too gradual. My recommendation is that the Social Security retirement age be raised by three months a year until a new eligibility age of seventy is reached in 2015—a phase-in that would leave Boomers plenty of time to plan ahead. In my view, early retirement should still be allowed at age sixty-two, but the benefits extended to early retirees should be reduced commensurately. When this reform had been entirely phased in, workers would still enjoy more years of full benefits than were envisioned when Social Security was founded. As Social Security's full-benefit eligibility age went up to seventy, so should Medicare's. Americans aged sixty-five to sixty-nine could still participate in the program, but only by paying extra premiums.

- *Set limits on federal health-benefit spending.* We must restructure health-care benefits to control federal health-care costs. Currently we offer fee-for-service reimbursement to all eligible comers, with few cost disincentives, and then surround the process with a thicket of regulatory controls. I propose that Medicare, Medicaid, and other health-benefit programs offer three choices: take a fixed-dollar voucher and use it toward the purchase of the health insurance of your choice; enroll in an accredited managed-care program that

reduction for company-paid health-care insurance (which now amounts to a \$92 billion annual subsidy from the federal government). This wasteful and regressive deduction should be capped. Federal efforts to establish national health-practice guidelines for doctors, hospitals, and insurers should be encouraged. Although these standards would not be mandatory (patients or providers would still be free to spend their own money for services above the guidelines), they would give everyone a clearer idea of the cost-effectiveness of various treatment options—something all experts agree we lack.

Finally, we need to reduce the huge costs of “defensive medicine,” through malpractice reform, and of “heroic” intervention when recovery is highly unlikely. Medicare spends approximately 30 percent of its budget on patients in their last year of life—often when the attempt to prolong life merely prolongs a hospitalized death. Few Americans want to end their lives this way. A recent survey shows that 89 percent of Americans support the concept of living wills. Yet only nine percent actually have them. Until we launch a widespread educational effort, make enforceable living wills widely available at very low cost, and perhaps even provide financial incentives to maintain them, doctors will continue to perform costly and painful procedures on patients who do not (or would not) want them and who will die in a few days or weeks anyway.

‘ENDOWMENT ETHIC,’ ACCEPTING RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE FUTURE.

will then bill the government a fixed annual amount; or remain in the current fee-for-service system and face much greater co-payments and deductibles.

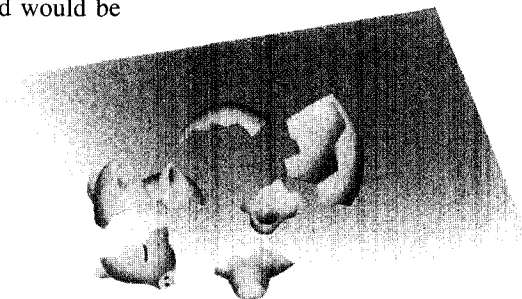
Any reform that seeks to introduce market discipline into our system of federal health benefits must give beneficiaries real incentives to be cost-conscious. Hence the greater co-payments and deductibles for those who choose the expensive fee-for-service option. The Medicare plan that Congress passed last year was all carrot and no stick. It gave beneficiaries the choice of enrolling in new kinds of managed-care plans, but would have imposed no penalty on those who opted to stay in traditional fee-for-service plans.

These measures would shift the task of cost control away from regulators and back to patients and providers, where it belongs. They would also allow Congress to live within a health-benefits budget, like the government of every other industrial country. As for the senior lobby's attachment to a “free choice of doctor” guarantee, voters must be reminded that a declining proportion of today's young workers—whose FICA taxes pay for much of Medicare—enjoy the full freedom of choice that was once common in American medicine. Most young workers consider themselves lucky if their employer pays for any health insurance at all.

Another prime candidate for reform is the unlimited tax de-

We should have no illusions about the future. Whatever reforms we implement, federal health-care costs are going to grow faster than our economy. This is one more reason why we must do everything possible to reduce growth in Social Security and other non-health-related programs.

3. *Extend working lives.* One of the best ways to reduce the crushing burden ahead is to encourage seniors to work longer—and make it easier for them to do so. This would require more than raising the age of eligibility for full benefits under Social Security and Medicare. To encourage longer working lives we should abolish the Social Security “earnings test” for beneficiaries who continue to work. (Let me stress that this reform *must* be implemented along with the affluence test I have described; a stand-alone aberration such as what Congress has recently proposed would be



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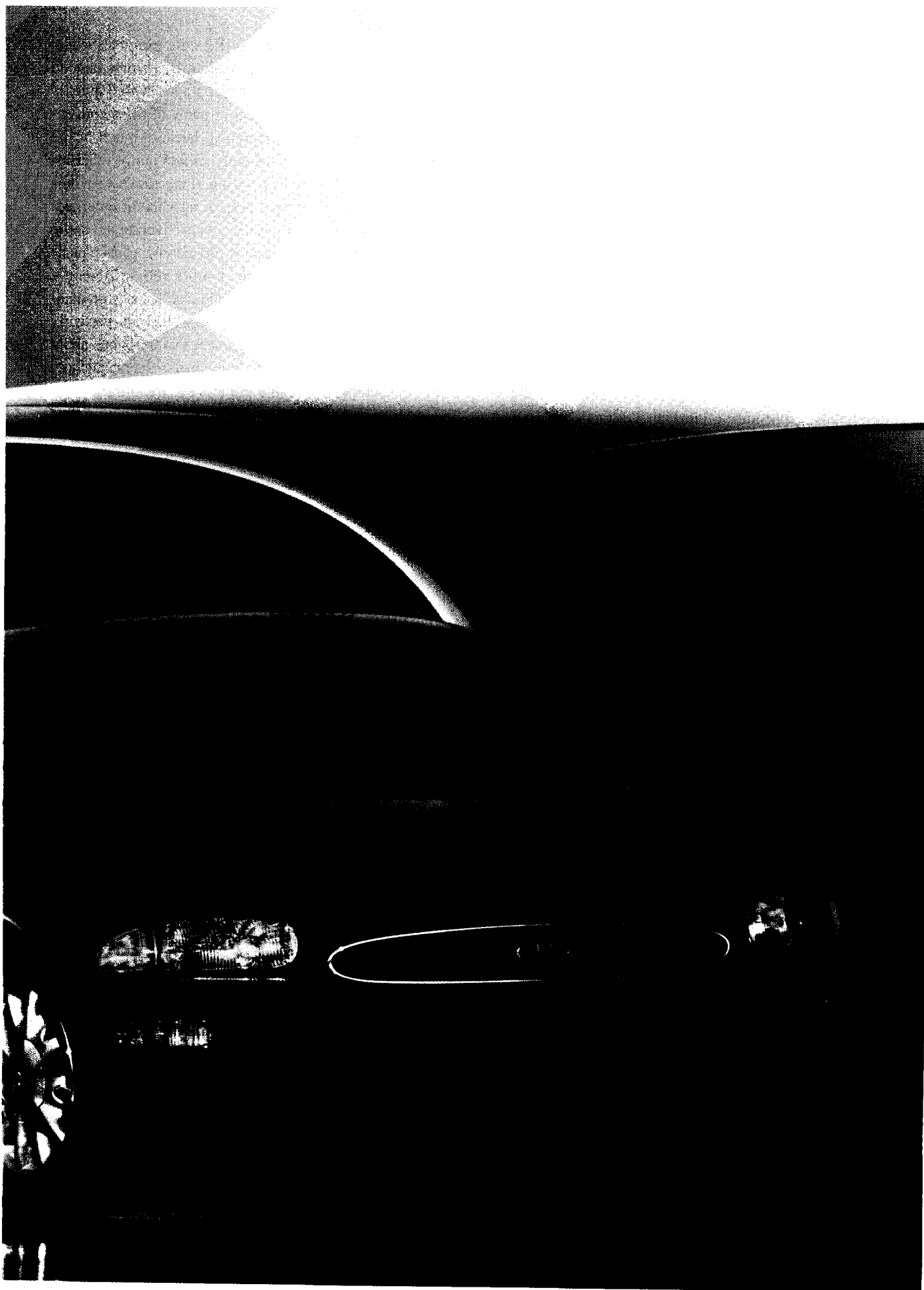
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an unearned windfall for senior-citizen CEOs like me.) Yes, there would be a small direct budget cost. But the benefits to the economy and to society, and to seniors themselves, of encouraging later retirement would be far more significant than the small increase in outlays.

The maturity, wisdom, and experience of older adults should not be lost to the workplace. This is a matter not just of combating age discrimination but of unlocking a powerful human resource. The market for jobs for which the elderly might be especially well suited should be explored: for example, full- and part-time service jobs in health care, child care, and various education and training efforts. It is time to do elders the honor of making their phase of life one of ongoing contribution—of genuine “generativity,” to use Erik Erikson’s classic description—as long as they are willing and able.

Not everyone, of course, is able to go on working. Richard Trumka, the president of the United Mine Workers, who recently served with me on the Kerrey-Danforth Commission on Entitlement and Tax Reform, warns that later retirement is simply not a realistic option for worn-out industrial laborers in physically demanding occupations. But such workers make up a small and shrinking share of the total labor force. Under my plan they would still have the option of early retirement (though with reduced benefits) and would be protected by federal Disability Insurance and Workers Compensation, not to mention the system of mandatory personal retirement accounts that I propose below. I would also use a small part of the savings achieved by raising the Social Security retirement age to lower eligibility ages and raise benefit levels under Supplemental Security Income, the means-tested floor of protection for the low-income elderly. In sum, we should encourage the elderly to work but not force work on those who are truly incapacitated. In any case, our national retirement policy should not be determined by the miner retiring at age sixty-two any more than by the police officer retiring at fifty-two or the athlete at forty-two.

4. Establish a system of mandatory pensions or personal retirement accounts. I have concluded—reluctantly—that a fully funded, privately managed, and portable system of personal retirement accounts should be mandatory. The system I envision would initially supplement Social Security—and over time might increasingly substitute for it. But Social Security would continue to provide a floor of protection to all Americans, albeit one subject to the limits of the affluence test described above. Governments around the world have tried to achieve both these objectives—retirement savings and poverty protection—in a single system. They have achieved neither efficiently.

Why mandatory? In 1993 C. Fred Bergsten, the chairman of the Competitiveness Policy Council (a publicly financed, bipartisan group), asked me to chair a committee on capital formation. An impressive group of the nation’s leading economists joined me in this effort. I had expected to hear

that certain tax favors for saving (IRAs, for example) would significantly increase net savings—that is, savings beyond the cost of the tax incentive that encourages them. I quickly learned otherwise. The net effect of many of these conventional incentives has been marginal, because much of the money deposited in IRAs is simply shifted out of other investments. When I asked how we might increase net savings significantly, one important area of agreement emerged: mandatory pensions or savings accounts covering the entire work force. In addition to boosting private saving, such plans—by making tomorrow’s retirees more self-sufficient—would allow us to reduce traditional Social Security gradually, thus reducing public dissaving as well. I am perfectly well aware of the libertarian argument that decisions about saving should be left entirely to individuals. The melancholy truth, however, is that many Americans are currently too myopic to save for the future unless compelled, and so end up becoming free-riders in the government safety net.

Why fully funded? First, to boost national savings. A funded retirement system would add to America’s capital stock; a pay-as-you-go system does not. Second, because the dynamics of pay-as-you-go financing have encouraged politicians around the world to promise benefits that can be paid for only by excessively high taxes on future generations. The only way to avoid that temptation is to make it clear to everyone that above some minimum safety net a worker’s future benefits will be determined solely by the resources that have been set aside for that worker, by some combination of employer contributions and the worker’s own savings. These pensions must be invested in diversified investment-grade assets and must be the worker’s personal property.

Why privately managed? A sound system of mandatory pension accounts must be publicly regulated to maintain fiduciary standards but should be privately managed to maximize returns. The evidence is overwhelming that publicly managed systems, which are often required to invest in low-return government securities, earn far less than privately managed accounts invested in the real economy.

Why portable? The new and fluid global economy, characterized by intense competition, rapid innovation, and relentless technological change, has made “lifetime employment” with one company rare. Instead making several major job changes in one’s lifetime—perhaps seven or eight for the average worker now in his or her twenties—is normal, and therefore many workers lack enough years of service in any one job to qualify for a pension. The plan I propose would vest all contributions immediately, and so workers could take their pension savings with them as they moved from job to job.

To provide adequate retirement income, these accounts would require substantial contributions. In my view, all workers (in some combination with employers) should be required to contribute four to six percent of their pay—which, added to FICA, would come to a total contribution of 16–18

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percent of pay. As a point of comparison, Australia's new system of mandatory pensions will ultimately result in total contributions of 15 percent of pay. In the scheme I propose, workers would have the option of making additional voluntary tax-free contributions. Employers who currently provide pensions could divert their contributions to workers' savings accounts as well. The primary function of this system would be to finance retirement and survivors' benefits; in time it might also pay for long-term medical care.

Although mandatory pension contributions would be made in addition to current FICA payroll taxes, and thus would decrease the consumable portion of each paycheck, the system would be linked to the Social Security reforms described above—and this would prevent FICA taxes from rising to the alarming levels forecast for the next century. Eventually workers would be paying no more (and maybe substantially less) in combined FICA and savings contributions under my plan than they would be paying in FICA taxes alone in a status quo future. By putting more of our income into genuine savings today, we could relieve the crushing payroll-tax rates that unfunded public transfers will otherwise exact on workers tomorrow.

The reform I propose would also require that any current-year Social Security or Medicare cash surplus be transferred, on a pro rata basis, to workers' personal retirement accounts. This provision would be consistent with pay-as-you-go accounting. Meanwhile, workers would have a direct stake in reforms that constrain future growth in federal benefits. To the extent that Social Security declines as a share of payroll, a growing share of FICA taxes would automatically be transferred to workers' savings accounts. Let me repeat: My proposal is for a two-tiered system under which everyone would continue to receive Social Security benefits. But over time my proposal would also allow us to go a step further. As the savings in private retirement accounts built, the current universal Social Security system could be converted into a purer and much less costly floor of protection that paid out benefits only to the truly needy.

A mandatory savings plan would generate substantial net gains in household (and national) savings—and thus ultimately gains in productivity and living standards. For middle- and upper-income workers subject to the affluence test this system would at least make up for reduced government retirement benefits—and probably go much further. For lower-income workers, who are the least likely to save (either on their own or through pensions), it would vastly reduce the chances of a destitute retirement. Seniors who were beneath the affluence-test threshold would receive their private pension on top of full federal benefits. True, the deduction from wages would be a burden, but it's worth noting that because of the Earned Income Tax Credit, the existing FICA tax on many of the working poor is now entirely borne by the federal government.

Dismissed until recently as too "radical," "privatization" of Social Security has burst upon the scene over the past year. Major proposals are under development at half a dozen think tanks—left, right, and center. Privatization has been featured on the cover of *Time* and embraced by the presidential candidate Steve Forbes, and, in one form or another, is endorsed by seven out of thirteen members of the Administration's official Social Security Advisory Council.

My plan has elements in common with many of these proposals. Where it differs from most is that it would fully pay for the transition to a funded Social Security system—and would do so *without adding to the national debt and without new general-purpose taxes*.

The challenge is that a single generation must somehow pay for two retirements—its own and that of its parents. Some proposals simply ignore the challenge. Take Steve Forbes's plan to keep all benefits for current retirees intact and yet permit younger workers to shift a substantial share of their FICA contributions into personal retirement accounts. What his plan would add to private savings it would cancel out dollar for dollar by increasing the federal deficit. Other proposals would issue Treasury debt directly to Social Security beneficiaries in the amount of the system's accumulated liabilities. This, too, is a zero-sum game that will leave tomorrow's workers no better off than if we had never reformed the system. A few proposals, like that of the Social Security Advisory Council, are more honest. But to pay for the transition they would resort to large general-purpose tax increases.

My plan would pay for transition costs the old-fashioned way: not with smoke and mirrors but by taking the essential step of asking current beneficiaries and current workers to give something up—the former by forgoing some benefits, the latter by saving more. This would not be painless. The magic of compounded returns from the stock market and other long-term investments cannot solve all our problems. To save more, we must consume less, at least temporarily. This "transition cost" is the price of escaping the generational chain letter we have so far depended on.

5. Shift our tax base from income to consumption. In an aging society taxpayers should be penalized for what they take out of the economy (consume) as opposed to what they put in (save). I therefore propose that only "consumed income"—spending, that is—be taxed. It is true that by exempting savings from taxation this reform would narrow the tax base. On the other hand, it would also widen the base, by rendering taxable various forms of government-financed and -subsidized consumption—from Social Security benefits and the insurance value of Medicare to employer-paid health care—which today are partly or fully tax exempt. Tax rates thus need not be any higher than they are today.

Many will object that consumption taxes are regressive; but the consumed-income tax plan introduced by Senators Sam Nunn and Pete Domenici—in which the more one

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biggest issue of the Presidential campaign?

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*Do today's
candidates have
the courage to
discuss it?*

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spends, the higher one's tax rate—demonstrates that consumption taxes need not sacrifice the principle of progressivity, which I support. Moreover, without increased saving we cannot expect the real income of the typical American household to grow again—and without such growth the distribution of incomes will continue to widen. The zero-sum politics of economic stagnation will overwhelm whatever weak contribution to economic equality we might continue to derive from our current system of progressive income-tax rates.

We are currently bombarded with tax-reform proposals of every variety—from sales taxes to flat taxes. Some want to get rid of the Internal Revenue Service. Some want tax returns that can be filled out on a postcard. Who doesn't want simplicity? And who likes the IRS? But I would suggest a more important criterion for evaluating tax reforms: Which is most likely to increase net national savings?

6. Mount a broad-scale public-education effort to promote saving. National leaders must help to mobilize citizens by articulating a sense of moral imperative. A thrift plan needs a bully pulpit.

Can the right kind of education and exhortation make a difference? Consider Japan. Until the 1950s, when the country rallied behind a campaign to promote thrift, the Japanese were poor savers. Since then they've become famous for their saving. Or consider Singapore, whose Central Provident Fund has furnished much of the investment capital that has fueled Singapore's legendary economic growth—not to mention the savings that have enabled nine out of ten households to become homeowners. Or consider Chile and Australia, which have also established national pension systems based on the principles of full funding and portability. In each instance public education was crucial to securing public support. In Chile, for instance, José Piñera, then the Minister of Labor, went on national television, often weekly, to explain why the mandatory pension plan was such good news for Chileans.

In a society like our own, where grassroots consensus is so important to governance, public discussion and debate are all the more important. The problem is that for at least three decades leaders have been telling us that consumption, not savings, is the key to prosperity. The campaign in favor of consumption has worked—all too well. Now it's time for a different kind of campaign—one in which not only our political leaders but also our businesses, our universities, and our public-policy institutions must persuade Americans to adapt to the realities of our aging society.



THE FIRST STEP TOWARD LONG-TERM BUDGET BALANCE IS TO

What we need most of all is a moral vision, a Middle-Class Bill of Responsibilities—not a gaggle of leaders falling over one another in their rush to propose a Middle-Class Bill of Rights, or the middle class silently rehearsing the mantra “We are not part of the problem and we need not be part of the solution.” Instead we must be encouraged to ask, What do we expect individuals and families to do for themselves, and what do we expect federal, state, or local governments to do for them? What are our responsibilities to our own children and grandchildren? How can we strengthen families so as to provide support for older people? What are our obligations as a nation to our collective progeny?

The manual for Germany’s social-security system looks, at first glance, a lot like our own—page after page describing the benefits due if one retires, is widowed, or loses one’s job. The most obvious difference is the generous benefits to German children. But there is a more striking contrast. For each benefit, alongside a box describing “Your Rights” is a box describing “Your Duties.” Citizens are thus reminded that society must always balance the payer against the payee, the future against the present. We need to find that balance again in our culture.

Why can’t the President call for a White House Conference on Aging different from the one held last year—not one that panders to the senior lobby but one that encourages serious dialogue between old and young? Why can’t the President call for a global summit at which the leading economies focus on reducing their tremendous and unsustainable unfunded liabilities, and at which developing economies with younger populations concentrate on avoiding the mistakes the industrial countries have made in providing old-age security?

Companies also have a major educational responsibility. With their human-resources and accounting departments, they are able to educate workers on the basics of saving—why they should save more, the power of compound interest, how to invest. They can also make it easier for their employees to save—through automatic salary deductions, 401K plans, stock-purchase and dividend-reinvestment plans.

Bringing our youth into the savings crusade is another key. John F. Kennedy once challenged us to ask not what our country can do for us but what we can do for our country. Today’s youth see the most conspicuous interest groups in our political system busily asking what the country can do

REDUCE ENTITLEMENTS FOR PEOPLE WHO DON'T NEED THEM.

for them. But who represents the future and the general interest? The young, alas, are the new silent majority. The demographer Samuel Preston once remarked apropos of the relentless growth in senior entitlements that the political system would behave a lot differently if people were forced to live their lives backward—that is, if they had to look forward to the burdens imposed upon youth as their own future.

I suggest that young people embark on dual careers—a private career and one as a citizen. As citizen lobbyists in behalf of the future, they are responsible for becoming informed about the debts they are going to assume, the unfunded liabilities they are going to pay for, and the unsustainable taxes they are going to bear. Once they are informed, perhaps America's youth will initiate an honest dialogue with their parents and grandparents, without assuming that their elders are greedy old fogies who don't care. My generation may be uninformed and even misinformed, but we do care about our children, our grandchildren, and our collective future. But if anyone is to create a general-interest lobby in behalf of the future, youth must lead the way.

If we expect our leaders to lead, the voters must make it safe for them to do so. The Concord Coalition is a bipartisan grassroots “lobby for the future,” dedicated to breathing new life into the American Dream. The warm reception we have received from countless concerned citizens has rekindled my faith that we can still build a special interest in behalf of the general interest.

CONCLUSION

AND what of the special role for geezers like me? Pessimists say, “Forget it”—Americans will not reform senior benefits until a severe crisis is actually upon us, but will persist in viewing them as contractual obligations that by definition are always affordable. After all, an America that acknowledges limits is an America that has lost the one illusion that makes it unique and creative. According to this view, America must always be an unteachable force of nature that can never back away from any promise or expectation, no matter how extravagant. This, pessimists say, is why American voters repeatedly elect leaders who promise lower taxes, higher benefits, rejuvenated economic growth, and a magic bullet for every social problem—without caring how the pieces fit together.

But I have a more optimistic view. Two years ago I was interviewed by *60 Minutes* about the need to enact gradual but far-reaching structural reforms in federal entitlements for the elderly. The show's producers, after patiently taping my arguments, invited me to join them at a middle-class retirement community. Here, they said (with a few wry smiles), I could explain my suggestions to those who would be immediately affected.

Standing before this group of retired grandparents, I be-

gan by showing photographs of my own grandchildren. I explained my concerns about their future and the world they would inherit. I then reminded the retirees how much of our national affluence today rests on the willingness we had to make collective sacrifices during the Great Depression and the Second World War. Back then we felt that we were “all in this together” for the sake of tomorrow. I told them that the German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer said it best for us when he observed, at the height of the Second World War, “The ultimate test of a moral society is the kind of world that it leaves to its children.”

Sooner or later, I told the retirees, we will have to prepare for the future. We will have to balance our public budgets, trim back benefits to those who need them least, save more as households, retire somewhat later from the work force, explore innovative means of economizing on health care, take a more effective public interest in the welfare of children, and offer the rising generation some tangible evidence that we are willing to make sacrifices in their behalf. If we do so sooner, we still have time to plan for a gradual and humane transformation. If we do so later, the changes are likely to be forced upon us, suddenly and painfully, in the midst of an economic, political, and family crisis that will leave the eventual outcome much in doubt.

Given all that, I asked them, if everything else were also put on the table and it really would lead to a balanced budget, how many of you would be willing to give up some share of your federal benefits, above what you need to live on, in order to ease the deficit burden on younger generations? To the visible surprise of the *60 Minutes* producers nearly everyone raised a hand.

The generation I was speaking to survived the Depression and fought and won the Second World War. After the war this generation provided its returned veterans with college educations, built the interstate highway system, eradicated polio, took us to the moon, and won the Cold War against communism. Against these monumental accomplishments what it would take to solve our current crisis seems small. I believe that this generation is capable of doing the right thing, and that politicians might well discover that it is better to appeal to their nobler instincts than to pander to their baser ones.

A people who have made a tradition of quick gratification must now be asked to focus on the requirements of a society graced with the patina of age—on saving rather than consumption, on prudence rather than desire, on collective restraint rather than individual satisfaction. As Americans grow older, they will have to recognize that the live-for-today attitude that may be endearing or at least understandable in youth is not just unseemly but ruinously dysfunctional at the far end of life. They would do well to heed the eighteenth-century French moralist Joseph Joubert, who warned, “The passions of the young are vices in the old.” ☞

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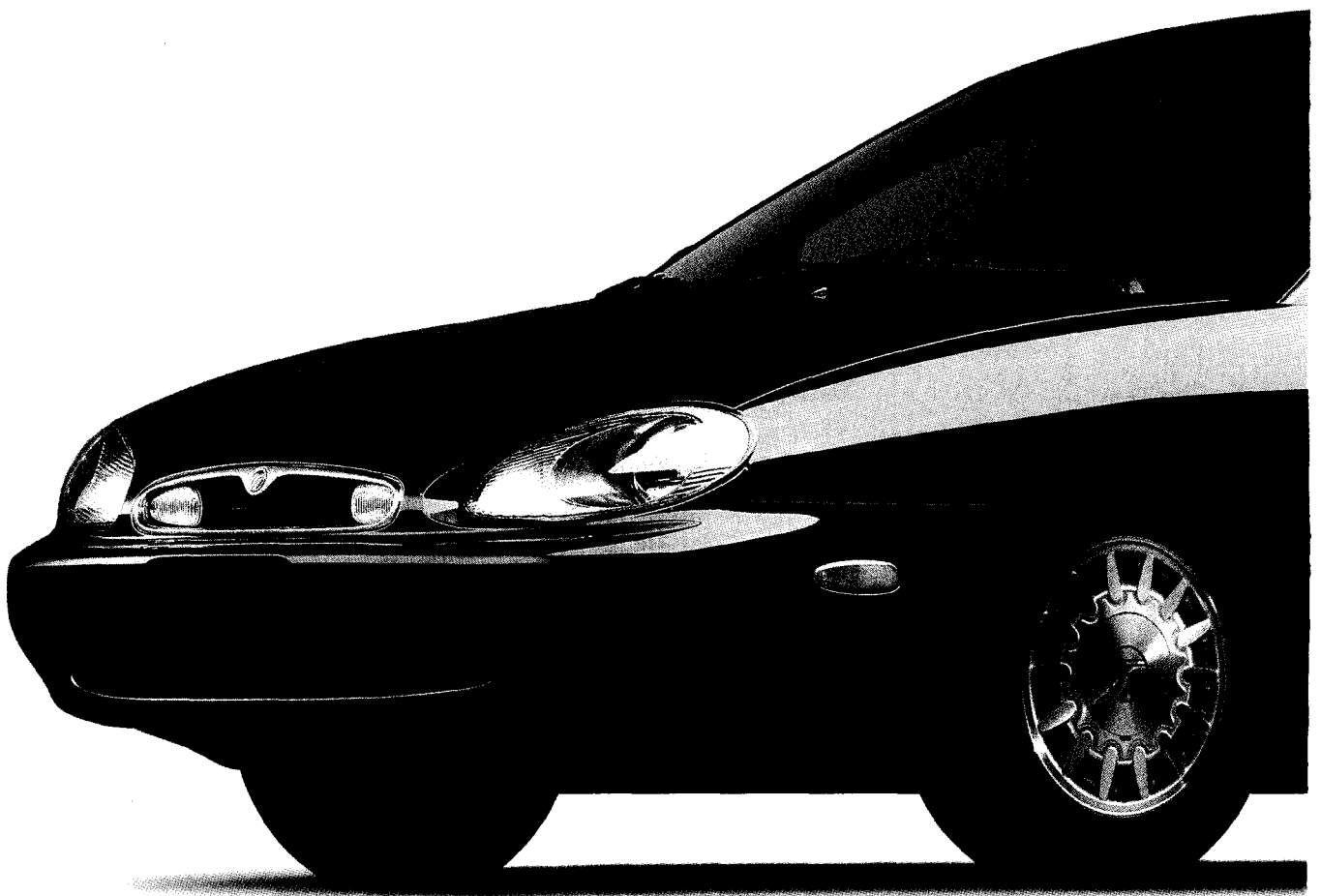
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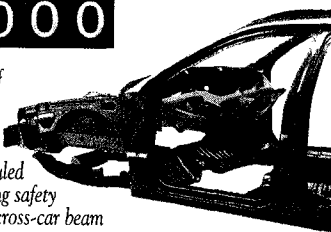


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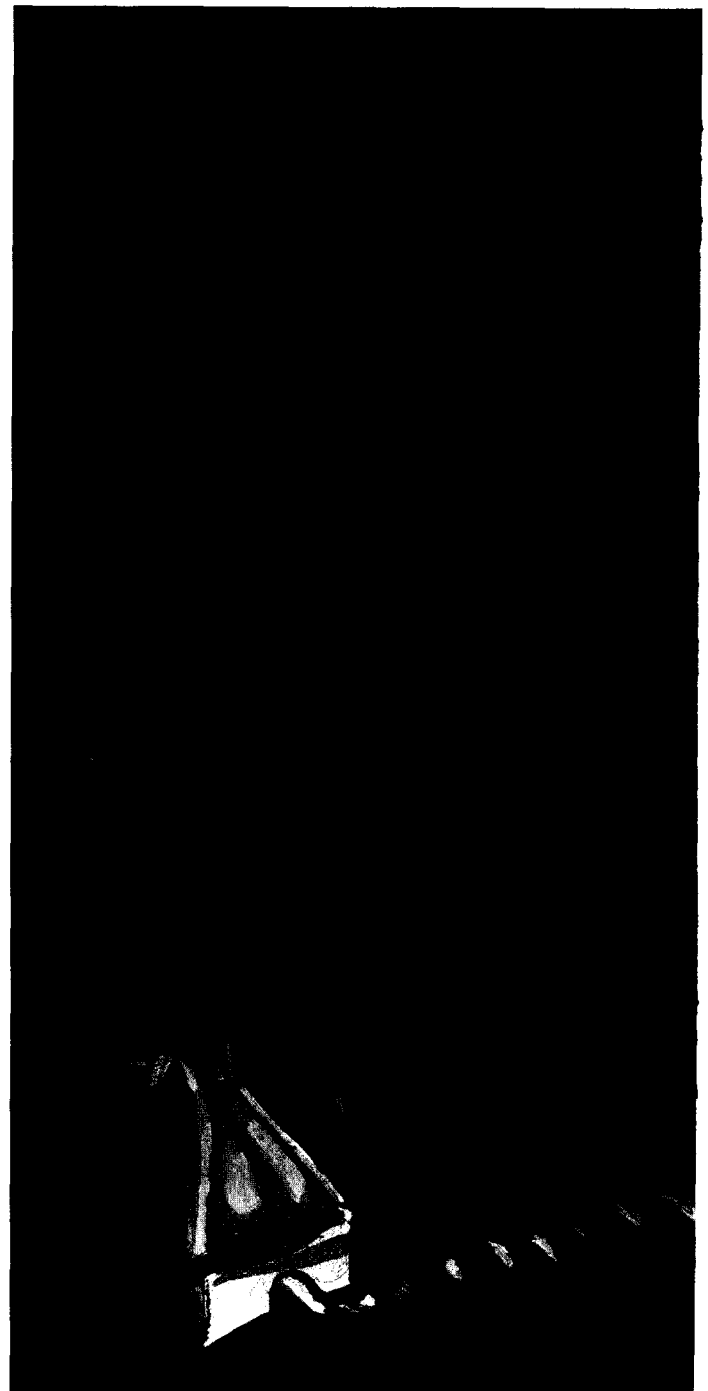
by CHARLES PORTIS

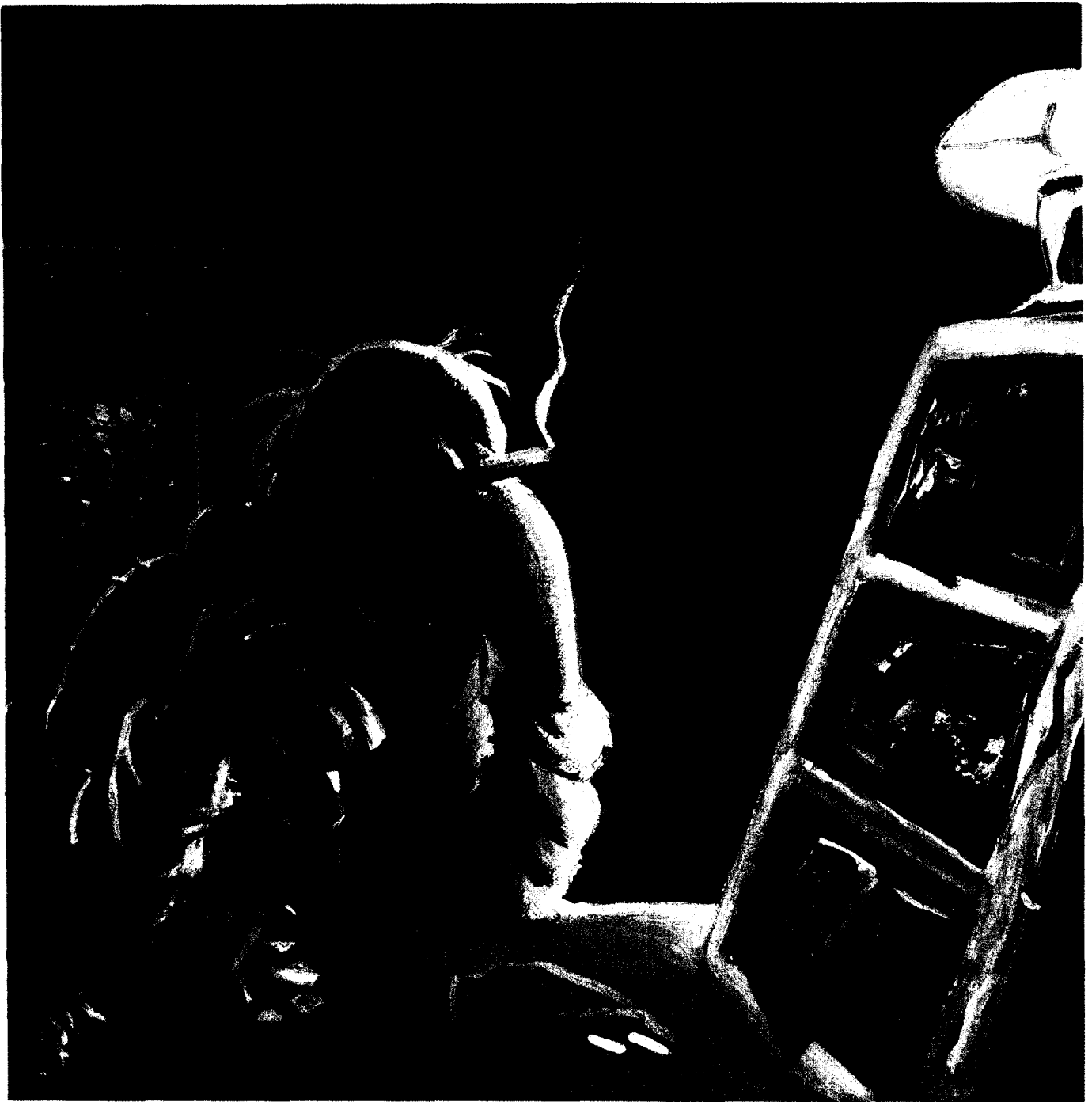
Neap's face is not very
clear to me. It drifts just out
of range. He said he could
feel his house going
down while we were talking
on the phone

ONCE you slip past that nurses' station in the east wing of D-3, you can get into the library at night easy enough if you have the keys. They keep the phone locked up in a desk drawer there but if you have the keys you can get it out and make all the long-distance calls you want to for free, and smoke all the cigarettes you want to, as long as you open a window and don't let the smoke pile up so thick inside that it sets off the smoke alarm. You don't want to set that thing to chirping. The library is a small

room. There are three walls of paperback westerns and one wall of windows and one desk.

I called up Neap down in Orange, Texas, and he said, "I live in a bog now." I hadn't seen him in forty-odd years and I woke him up in the middle of the night and that was the first thing out of his mouth. "My house is sinking. I live in a bog now." I told him I had been thinking about the Fox Company Raid and thought I would give him a ring. We called it the Fox Company Raid, but it wasn't a company





raid or even a platoon raid, it was just a squad of us, with three or four extra guys carrying pump shotguns for trench work. Neap said he didn't remember me. Then he said he did remember me, but not very well. He said, "I don't talk service no more."

We had been in reserve and had gone back up on the line to relieve some kind of pacifist division. Those boys had something like "Live and Let Live" on their shoulder patches. When they went out on patrol at night, they faked it.

They would go out about a hundred yards and lie down in the paddies, and doze off, too, like some of the night nurses on D-3. When they came back, they would say they had been all the way over to the Chinese outposts but had failed to engage the enemy. They failed night after night. Right behind the line the mortar guys sat around in their mortar pits and played cards all day. I don't believe they even had aiming stakes set up around their pits. They hated to fire those tubes because the Chinese would fire right back.

It was a different story when we took over. The first thing we did was go all the way over to the Chinese main line. On the first dark night we left our trenches and crossed the paddies and slipped past their outposts and went up the mountainside and crawled into their trench line before they knew what was up. We shot up the place pretty good and blew two bunkers, or tried to, and got out of there fast with three live prisoners. One was a young officer. Those trenches had a sour smell. There was a lot of noise. The Chinese fired off yellow flares and red flares, and they hollered and sprayed pistol bullets with their burp guns and threw those wooden potato-masher grenades with the cast-iron heads. The air was damp and some of them didn't go off. Their fuses weren't very good. Their grenade fuses would sputter and go out. We were in and out of there before they knew what had hit them. It could happen to anybody. They were good soldiers and just happened to get caught by surprise, by sixteen boys from Fox Company. You think of Chinese soldiers as boiling all around you like fire ants, but once you get into their trench line, not even the Chinese army can put up a front wider than one man.

Neap said, "I don't talk service no more," but he didn't hang up on me. Sometimes they do, it being so late at night when I call. Mostly they're glad to hear from me and we'll sit in the dark and talk service for a long time. I sit here in the dark at the library desk smoking my Camels and I think they sit in the dark too, on the edges of their beds with their bare feet on the floor.

I told Neap service was the only thing I did talk, and that I had the keys now and was talking service coast to coast every night. He said his house was in bad shape. His wife had something wrong with her too. I didn't care about that stuff. His wife wasn't on the Fox Company Raid. I didn't care whether his house was level or not but you like to be polite and I asked him if his house was sinking even all around. He said no, it was settling bad at the back, to where they couldn't get through the back door, and the front was all lifted up in the air, to where they had to use a little stepladder to get up on their front porch.

You were supposed to get a week of meritorious R and R in Hong Kong if you brought in a live prisoner. We dragged three live prisoners all the way back from the Chinese main line of resistance and one was an officer and I never got one day of R and R in Hong Kong. Sergeant Zim was the only one who ever did get it that I know of. On the regular kind of R and R you went to Kyoto, which was all right, but it wasn't meritorious R and R. I asked Neap if he knew of anyone besides Zim who got meritorious R and R in Hong Kong. He said he didn't even know Zim got it.

He asked me if I was in a nut ward. I asked him how many guys he could name who went on the Fox Company Raid, not counting him and me and Zim. All he could come up with was Dill, Vick, Bogue, Ball, and Sipe. I gave him eight

more names real fast, and the towns and states they came from. "Now who's the nut? Who's soft in the head now, Neap? Who knows more about the Fox Company Raid, you or me?" I didn't say that to him because you try to be polite when you can. I didn't have to say it. You could tell I had rattled him pretty good, the way I whipped off all those names.

He asked me how much disability money I was drawing down. I told him and he said it was a hell of a note that guys in the nut ward were drawing down more money than he was on Social Security. I told him Dill was dead, and Gott. He said yeah, but Dill was on Okinawa in 1945, in the other war, and was older than us. He told me a little story about Dill. I had heard it before. Dill was talking to the captain outside the command-post bunker, telling him about the time on Okinawa he had guided a flamethrower tank across open ground, to burn a Jap field gun out of a cave. Dill said, "They was a whole bunch of far come out of that thang in a hurry, Skipper." Neap laughed over the phone. He said, "I still laugh every time I think about that. 'They was a whooooooole bunch of far come out of that thang in a hurry, Skipper.' The way he said it, you know, Dill."

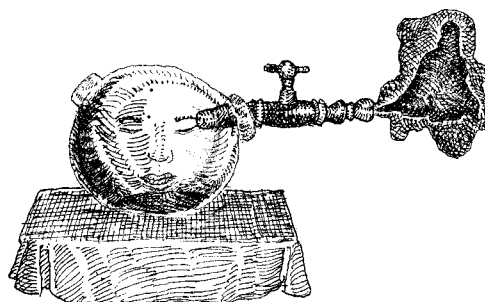
Neap thought I must be having a lot of trouble tracking people down. I haven't had any trouble to speak of. Except for me and Foy and Rust, who are far from home, and Sipe, who is a fugitive from justice, everybody else went back home and stayed there. They left home just that one time. Neap was surprised to hear that Sipe was on the lam, at his age. How fast could Sipe be moving these days, at his age? Neap said it was Dill and Sipe who grabbed those prisoners and that Zim had nothing to do with it. I told him Zim had something to do with getting us over there and back. He said yeah, Zim was all right, but he didn't do no more in that stinking trench line than we did, and so how come he got meritorious R and R in Hong Kong and we didn't? I couldn't answer that question. I can't find anyone who knows the answer to that. I told him I hadn't called up Zim yet, over in Niles, Michigan. I wanted to have the squad pretty much accounted for before I made my report to him. Neap said, "Tell Zim I'm living on a mud flat." I told him he was the last one I had to call up before Zim. I put Neap at the bottom of my list because I couldn't remember much about him.

I can still see the faces of those boys who went on the Fox Company Raid, except that Neap's face is not very clear to me. It drifts just out of range. He said he could feel his house going down while we were talking there on the phone. He said his house was going down fast now, and with him and his wife in it. It sounded to me like the Neaps were going all the way down.

He asked me how it was here. He wanted to know how it was in this place and I told him it wasn't so bad. It's not so bad here if you have the keys. For a long time I didn't have the keys. ☼

The Nitrous Oxide Philosopher

by DMITRI TYMOCZKO



*Do drugs make religious experience possible?
They did for William James and for other philosopher-mystics of his day.
James's experiments with psychoactive drugs raise difficult
questions about belief and its conditions*

HE has short hair and a long brown beard. He is wearing a three-piece suit. One imagines him slumped over his desk, giggling helplessly. Pushed to one side is an apparatus out of a junior-high science experiment: a beaker containing some ammonium nitrate, a few inches of tubing, a cloth bag. Under one hand is a piece of paper, on which he has written, "That sounds like nonsense but it is pure *onsense!*" He giggles a little more. The writing trails away. He holds his forehead in both hands. He is stoned. He is William James, the American psychologist and philosopher. And for the first time he feels that he is understanding religious mysticism.

The psychedelia of the 1960s was foreshadowed by events in the waning years of the nineteenth century. This first American psychedelic movement began with an anonymous article published in 1874 in *The Atlantic Monthly*. The article, which was in fact written by James, reviewed *The Anaesthetic Revelation and the Gist of Philosophy*, a pamphlet arguing that the secrets of religion and philosophy were to be found in the rush of nitrous oxide intoxication. Inspired by this thought, James experimented with the drug, experiencing extraordinary revelations that he immediately committed to paper.

What's mistake but a kind of take?
What's nausea but a kind of -ausea?
Sober, drunk, -unk, astonishment. . . .
Agreement—disagreement!!
Emotion—motion!!! . . .
Reconciliation of opposites; sober, drunk, all the same!
Good and evil reconciled in a laugh!
It escapes, it escapes!
But—
What escapes, WHAT escapes?

This experience, which in James's words involved "the



**Which was
the "real" William
James—the drug-
addled visionary
spouting mystical
drivel, or the
sober psychologist
whose researches
brought him inter-
national fame?**

strongest emotion" he had ever had, remained with him throughout his life. In 1882 he first described his experiments with the drug; in 1898 he published an article titled "Consciousness Under Nitrous Oxide" in the *Psychological Review*; in 1902 he recounted the experience in his greatest work, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*; and in 1910, in the last essay he completed, he implied that nitrous oxide had had an abiding influence on his thinking.

When the drug wore off, James found that his mystical insights had disappeared. What remained were incomprehensible words—"tattered fragments" that seemed like "meaningless

drivel." Being a philosophical visionary rather than a garden-variety recreational drug user, however, James was not inclined to let his sober consciousness have the final say. On the contrary, he took his experiences with nitrous oxide as evidence that human life was more richly varied than he had previously (and soberly) imagined. "Some years ago," he wrote in *Varieties*,

I myself made some observations on . . . nitrous oxide intoxication, and reported them in print. One conclusion was forced upon my mind at that time, and my impression of its truth has ever since remained unshaken. It is that our normal waking consciousness, rational consciousness as we call it, is but one special type of consciousness, whilst all about it, parted from it by the filmiest of screens, there lie potential forms of consciousness entirely different.

For James, these alternate forms of consciousness were accessible only by way of artificial intoxicants. Others, he hypothesized, were able to reach them without the aid of drugs: in his view the great religious mystics, and certain mystical philosophers including Hegel, were "unusually susceptible" to these extraordinary forms of consciousness.

James's experiences with nitrous oxide helped to crystallize some of the major tenets of his philosophy. His writings emphasize, for instance, the notion of pluralism, according to which "to the very last, there are various 'points of view' which the philosopher must distinguish in discussing the world." Nitrous oxide had revealed in the most dramatic way possible the existence of alternate points of view.

Which was the "real" William James—the drug-addled visionary who spouted meaningless mystical drivel, or the sober, unmythical psychologist whose researches brought him international fame? James's philosophy was based on the thought that the good life—for society and, by extension, for an individual as well—involves a plurality of perspectives, of which the mystical and the scientific are only two. Equally important to the mature Jamesian outlook was the thought that religious experiences are *psychologically real*—powerful and palpable events that can have important long-term consequences *whether the beliefs to which they give rise are true or not*. Drugs helped James to understand what religious belief was like from the inside. When he took nitrous oxide, he was for all intents and purposes a religious mystic. ("Thought deeper than speech!" he wrote while on the drug. "Oh my God, oh God, oh God!") Nitrous oxide was the passport that allowed James to see religion from the believer's perspective, traveling between the worlds of science and faith.

Yet James's experiments with nitrous oxide, when they have been noticed at all, have been variously derided. Even in the nineteenth century, skeptical scientists found his interest in exotic mental phenomena misguided, if not reckless. Religious believers tend to resent the comparison of intoxication to religious inspiration. Veterans of the counterculture, who have all had similar if not more-intense drug revelations, tend to think of James as a dabbler. These criticisms are shortsighted, and slight the fact that James was America's first philosophical genius. Perhaps more than any philosopher before him, he succeeded in combining the skepticism of the empirical scientist, the form of consciousness that "diminishes, discriminates, and says no," with the hyperbole of the mystical visionary, the form of consciousness that "expands, unites, and says yes." If drugs helped him to open the doors of consciousness in this welcoming way, perhaps we should rethink some of our assumptions about drug use and its possible role in human life. For example, can drugs play a role in authentic religious experience? And if so, what should be the legal and moral status of religious drug use?

These questions lead into a fascinating tangle of history and philosophy, much of which has surprising relevance to contemporary policy. Indeed, for more than thirty years courts, legislatures, and philosophers have been debating James's questions, reaching a bewildering variety of incompatible conclusions. Some courts have held that religious drug use is legitimate and even deserves constitutional protection; others—including the Supreme Court—have rejected these arguments. In 1993 Congress passed a law allowing for the sacramental use of peyote, a powerful hallucinogen; yet politicians continue to excoriate "drug use," as if "drugs" were a single sort of unequivocally bad thing. (One wonders how many of the congressional representatives who passed

the peyote law would be willing to acknowledge publicly their support for hallucinogenic drug use.) William James thought more clearly about these issues than we are able to think today, and we may want to look to James as we consider the place of drugs in contemporary life.

An "Adamic" Revelation

JAMES'S interest in nitrous oxide was prompted by a man named Benjamin Paul Blood. Born in 1832, Blood—a farmer, philosopher, athletic strongman, prodigious calculator, debunker, inventor, mystic, and forgotten visionary, and the author of the pamphlet *The Anaesthetic Revelation and the Gist of Philosophy*—is a classic figure of nineteenth-century America. By his own confession an idler, a "fraud," haphazardly educated and with little gift for sustained argument, Blood spent his eighty-six years in Amsterdam, a town in upstate New York. But despite his limitations, or perhaps because of them, he devoted his life to philosophy. The bulk of his writing consists of letters to the editors of local papers: the *Amsterdam Gazette* and *Recorder*, the *Utica Herald*, the *Albany Times*. (Some of these letters were amalgamated for the *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*.) He published a few poems in *Scribner's Magazine*. Eventually he wrote a book, *Pluriverse: An Essay in the Philosophy of Pluralism*.

Blood could multiply large numbers in his head. He could demolish the itinerant lecturers who were a staple of nineteenth-century American popular culture. On one occasion he demonstrated to an astonished crowd how a visiting spiritualist had produced apparently ghostly occurrences. On another he used the doctrines of what was then called modern philosophy to challenge an astronomer's glorification of space: Why, he asked, should we be impressed by the size of the solar system if size is relative to the perceiver? Would not a giant find the universe small? And is it not, therefore, we who make space large, since without us it would be neither large nor small? Amsterdam was not always up to these speculations, but it loved Blood nonetheless. Bewildered newspaper editors cheerfully printed his grandiose contributions. Townspeople spoke in admiring terms of Blood's letters from such luminaries as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Grover Cleveland, and William James. And, as Blood was not above mentioning, in a poll conducted by one of the local papers he placed as "one of the twelve leading citizens" of the town—number six, to be precise.

The outside world, however, was less kind. The portentous letters Blood directed to innumerable nineteenth-century eminentos were for the most part met with polite dismissal. One appeal, it is true, produced an invitation to visit Alfred Lord Tennyson; another resulted in a lengthy and affectionate correspondence with James. But in the main Blood lived his long life alone. Thumbing through the detri-

tus of his "papers," the inconsequential letters and crumbling newspaper clippings that some admirer deposited in Harvard's Houghton Library, one catches the unmistakable whiff of intellectual tragedy. Blood was the very picture of the half-baked American eccentric, a snake-oil salesman with philosophical pretensions. Born in the wrong place and at the wrong time, he knew too little to put his talents to good use, and too much to let them atrophy gracefully.

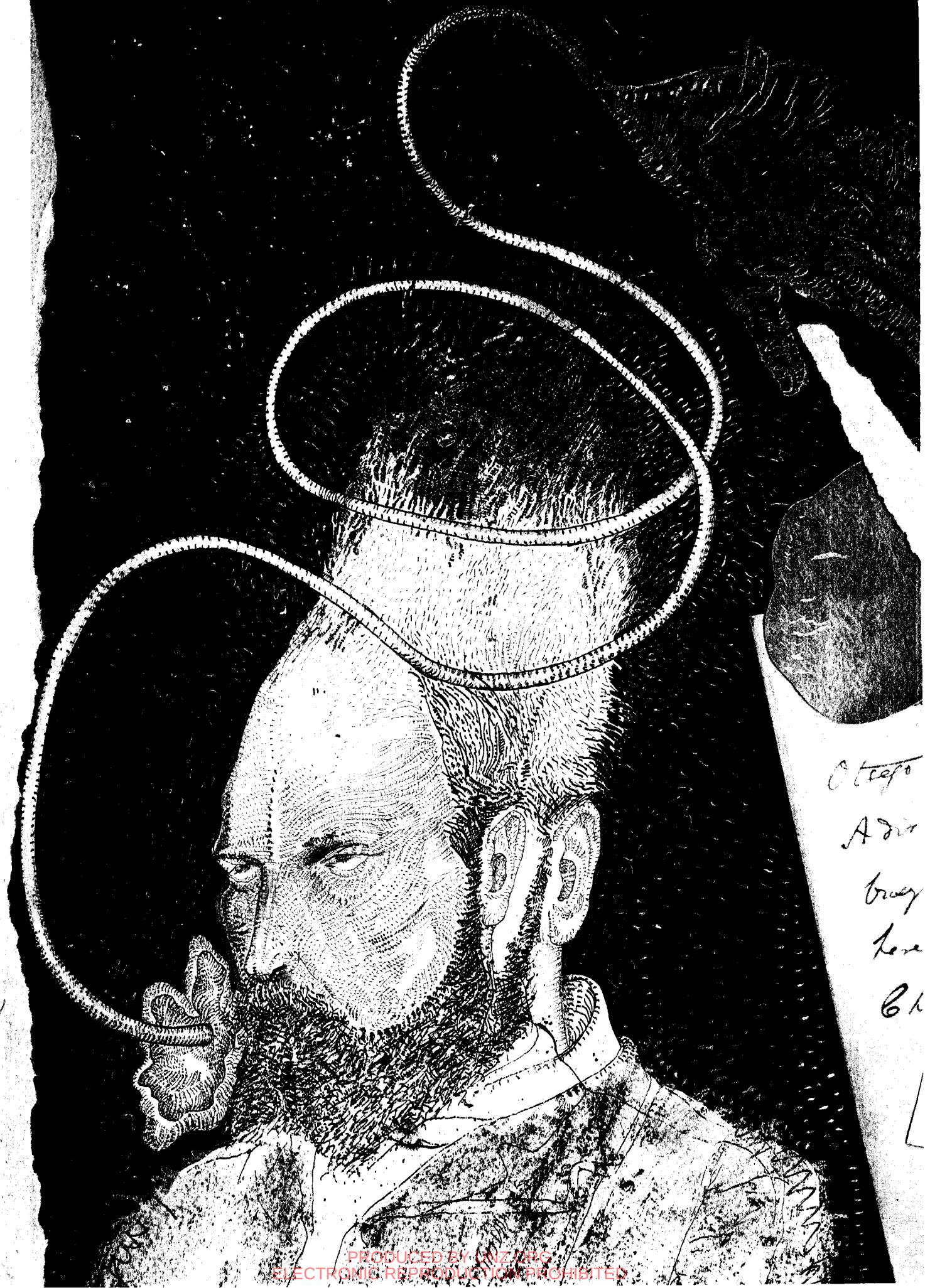
Blood's obsession with nitrous oxide began at a dentist's office. Nitrous oxide, or "laughing gas," had been discovered in 1772 by Joseph Priestley. Its distinctive psychoactive properties were noticed twenty-seven years later by Sir Humphrey Davy, whose *Researches, Chemical and Philosophical, Chiefly Concerning Nitrous Oxide, or Dephlogisticated Nitrous Air, and Its Respiration* records a series of attempts to try to find a use for the new drug. Notwithstanding Davy's efforts, the drug was used in the early half of the century primarily for recreation. One nineteenth-century observer wrote that ether, which has similar psychoactive properties, had "long been the toy of professors and students," and noted that "the students at Cambridge [Harvard] used to inhale sulphuric ether from their handkerchiefs, and that it intoxicated them, making them reel and stagger." Ether was first put to its modern use in 1846, when, in one of the major triumphs of nineteenth-century medicine, W.T.G. Morton, an American dentist, "administered the vapor of sulphuric ether to a patient, and extracted a tooth, the patient being in a state of entire insensibility." A similar result followed shortly thereafter with nitrous oxide, and the modern practice of anesthesia was born.

Enter Blood. In the preface to his book, *Pluriverse*, he wrote,

It was in the year 1860 that there came to me, through the necessary [medical] use of anaesthetics, a Revelation or insight of the immemorial Mystery which among enlightened peoples still persists as the philosophical secret or problem of the world. . . . After fourteen years of this experience at varying intervals, I published in 1874 "The Anaesthetic Revelation and the Gist of Philosophy," not assuming to define therein the purport of the illumination, but rather to signalize the experience, and in a résumé of philosophy to show wherein that had come short of it.

Blood held that the great metaphysical philosophers, from Plato to Hegel, had all experienced something like what he had experienced while on nitrous oxide. This "anaesthetic revelation," he argued, was "primordial," "Adamic," and incommunicable. He wrote to James, "Philosophy is past. It was the long endeavor to logicize what we can only realize practically or in immediate experience."

Tireless proselytizing on behalf of his pamphlet—Blood sent copies to virtually everyone he could think of—eventually resulted in the formation of a tiny group of nitrous oxide philosophers, who agreed that the drug produced some sort



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of incommunicable metaphysical illumination. One was Xenos Clark, a philosopher who died young in Amherst, Massachusetts. (His last days were spent collecting his writings on the "anaesthetic revelation," which he asked James to transmit to posterity.) Other experimenters included some impressive figures: Edmund Gurney, an English spiritualist who had written a heavy two-volume catalogue of telepathic events, hauntings, and other ghostly occurrences (*Phantasms of the Living*, 1886); J. A. Symonds, the poet, historian, and biographer; Professor William Ramsay, a 1904 Nobel laureate and the discoverer of the inert gases; and, of course, William James. All reported "metaphysical insights" under the influence of nitrous oxide or similar drugs. Even Tennyson, while he was recovering from an experience with ether, blurted out "a long metaphysical term"—unfortunately not recorded.

Many of these figures were associated with the British Society for Psychical Research. Founded in 1882, the society (which still exists) aimed to test with an unbiased, scientific eye reports of a wide variety of unusual experiences not recognized by the academic establishment. Its province was what we would now call parapsychology: claims of hauntings, telepathy, spontaneous mental healings, visions of the dead, and other supernatural occurrences. Members conducted research, collected reports of paranormal activity, and published a journal. Blood's claim—that nitrous oxide reliably produced the experience of metaphysical illumination—engaged the society, and its members immediately set about to verify or disprove it.

James was attracted to the society by its peculiar mixture of scientific caution and romantic optimism. The son of a Swedenborgian, James was permanently suspended between the poles of faith and reason. Although he was uncomfortable with his father's visionary excess, he was scandalized by the neglect of this very quality on the part of the more reputable sciences. He wrote in "What Psychical Research Has Accomplished,"

No part of the unclassified residuum [of human experience] has usually been treated with a more contemptuous scientific disregard than the mass of phenomena generally called *mystical*. Physiology will have nothing to do with them. Orthodox psychology turns its back on them. Medicine sweeps them out; or, at most, when in an anecdotal vein, records a few of them as "effects of the imagination"—a phrase of mere dismissal, whose meaning, in this connection, it is impossible to make precise. All the while, however, the phenomena are there, lying broadcast over the surface of history.

James even went so far as to compare this disregard to that of a religious believer who refuses to acknowledge scientific considerations that weigh against his or her cause: "Certain of our positivists keep chiming to us that, amid the wreck of every other god and idol, one divinity still stands upright,—

At the time
of his experiments
James thought
that religion,
though it might be
based on untruth
from the scientific
point of view,
was nevertheless
good for one.

that his name is Scientific Truth, and that he has but one commandment, but that one supreme, saying, *Thou shalt not be a theist.*" James wanted a more radical empiricism, a science freed of preconceptions, for which the issue of religious belief had not been foreclosed ahead of the evidence.

It was Blood, more than any other single figure, who embodied this attitude. James's final published essay, "A Pluralist Mystic," was a sustained encomium of Amsterdam's finest philosopher. Blood's work, he wrote, "fascinated me so 'weirdly' that I am conscious of its having been one of the stepping-

stones of my thinking ever since." Blood gave James confidence that empirical and mystical sympathies could be combined. James wrote,

One cannot criticize the vision of a mystic—one can but pass it by, or else accept it as having some amount of evidential weight. I felt unable to do either with a good conscience until I met with Mr. Blood. . . . I confess that the existence of this novel brand of mysticism has made my cowering mood depart.

Blood's was a "pluralist mysticism" because it presented his extraordinary mystical experiences simply *as* experiences, without chaining them to a grand systematic doctrine such as Christianity or Hegelian philosophy. Moreover, it provided others with a key to those experiences, nitrous oxide, with which they could test Blood's claims in controlled and scientific surroundings. It was, in short, a mysticism without dogma or conclusions—just the thing for a Harvard professor with strong religious sympathies.

Did Religion Begin With Drugs?

DRUGS have long been associated with religion. Psychedelic mushrooms were used in Siberia more than 6,000 years ago. The ceremonial use of marijuana among the Scythians dates back almost 2,500 years. Haoma, a sacred drink of the Zoroastrians, and soma, an early Hindu analogue, are both presumed to have been made from psychedelic plants; scriptural references to the drinking of "sacred urine" have led some historians to propose that the

plants in question may have included the *Amanita muscaria* mushroom, whose active ingredient passes into urine without a significant loss of potency. The ancient Greek cult of Dionysus used wine to provoke visions, and other Greek mystery cults may have used psychoactive substances. (The use of wine in Christian rituals may be a remnant of similar practices.) In the New World the religious use of psychedelic mushrooms has been widely practiced—among the Mayans, in the Aztec empire, and today, by many members of the Native American Church. In view of this extensive transcultural association between religion and drug use, at least one scholar—R. Gordon Wasson, an authority on mushroom cults—has proposed that the religious impulse itself originated with drugs, as a confused reaction to intense experiences provoked by the accidental ingestion of psychoactive plants.

James's interest in the connection between drugs and religion was unusual in one crucial respect. Unlike other drug-using mystics, he did not see drugs as a means to understanding higher religious truths; on the contrary, he used drugs because they provided him with access to beliefs that were potentially *false*. At the time of his experiments with nitrous oxide James thought that religion, though it might be based on untruth from the scientific point of view, was nevertheless good for one. It had survival value: in the long run religion helped human beings to live rich and happy lives. In "Is Life Worth Living?" he offered the analogy of a mountain climber who is stuck in a tight place.

Suppose, for instance, that you are climbing a mountain, and have worked yourself into a position from which the only escape is by a terrible leap. Have faith that you can successfully make it, and your feet are nerved to its accomplishment. But mistrust yourself, and think of all the sweet things you have heard the scientists say of *maybes*, and you will hesitate so long that, at last, all unstrung and trembling, and launching yourself in a moment of despair, you roll in the abyss.

This analogy, which emphasizes belief's potential usefulness rather than its truth, is utterly characteristic of James, a man who arrived at philosophy by way of medicine and psychology rather than physical science and logic.

At the age of twenty-eight James had fallen into a period of deep depression. Unable to see his way around the determinism of his materialist friends, he felt pessimistic, not just about the possibility of human freedom in a world of physical laws but also about his own aptitude for philosophy. The death of a favorite cousin, coupled with repeated bouts of physical illness, exacerbated his situation. Finally came a crisis. One night, walking into a darkened room, James had a sudden hallucinatory vision: a young man he had once seen, a patient at a mental hospital, black-haired, with "greenish" skin, sitting on a bench against the wall, his legs pressed up against his chest, moving only his eyes. "*That shape am I,*"

James wrote: a powerless waif, observing a world he could not change. After this, he said, “the universe changed entirely.” He began to wake up each morning with dread in his stomach. For months he was afraid to go into the dark alone. Concealing his condition from the people around him, James quietly contemplated suicide.

Over the next few months his melancholia faded somewhat. Then, on April 30, 1870, a dam burst.

I think yesterday was a crisis in my life. I finished the first part of Renouvier’s 2nd Essay and saw no reason why his definition of free will—“the sustaining of a thought *because I choose to* when I might have other thoughts”—need be the definition of an illusion. At any rate I will assume for the present—until next year—that it is no illusion. My first act of free will shall be to believe in free will. For the remainder of the year, I will abstain from the mere

VASECTOMY

for Adam Smith

No one’s notified the workers
shares have been split, the factory sold.
Frames are still being welded, transmissions
bolted to engines, acetylene torches lit
gold like the light from miners’ helmets
on groaning timber. Coal
is still chiseled, and dust
spun into lungs. No one’s posted signs:
Road Out. Bridge Out. Danger Ahead.
Fingers black with dye, young girls
disappear in looms. Women
boil metal, pour it steaming into molds.
Day fused to night, millions of laborers,
backs crooked and hands cracked,
manufacture bottles, canisters, and cogs,
replicating product
that will never reach foreign markets.
Soldiers turn semis back at the border.
Executives charter planes,
shift funds into Swiss accounts.
How long before word of this
hits the factories, the mines, the wicked
textile mills? What good, what possible good,
is supply without demand?

—THOM WARD

speculation & contemplative [meditation] in which my nature takes most delight, and voluntarily cultivate the feeling of moral freedom, by reading books favorable to it, as well as by acting.

James chose to believe in free will not because he thought it was true but because it was necessary to his well-being. Like the mountain climber facing a life-or-death jump, he simply screwed up his courage and told himself that he was free. “In such a case,” James wrote about the mountain climber, “(and it belongs to an enormous class) the part of wisdom as well as of courage is to *believe what is in the line of your needs*, for only by such belief is the need fulfilled.”

James’s career involved a progressive generalization of this thought. What began as a simple, almost physical necessity—a personal need to believe in free will in order to escape crushing moral paralysis—blossomed into a full-fledged philosophical doctrine. Beliefs, James eventually decided, were adaptations, like the giraffe’s long neck or the tiger’s claws: they were justifiable only insofar as they helped people to get around in the world. To believe what one needed to believe was no mere sign of weakness, as some of James’s contemporaries contended. Rather, it showed a healthy understanding of what the process of believing was all about. In particular James argued that we are not obligated to be determinists, atheists, or materialists just because science might say that those are the correct and true doctrines. Ultimately science itself should be evaluated in terms of a higher moral question: To what extent are scientific beliefs conducive to human happiness?

Positive Illusions

SOME remarkable work by psychologists has recently illuminated James’s position. Lyn Abramson, of the University of Wisconsin, and Lauren Alloy, of Temple University, have uncovered a number of “cognitive illusions” to which normal, healthy people are subject. Emotional health, they suggest, involves mildly overoptimistic presumptions and a corresponding insensitivity to failure, which result in a propensity to make straightforwardly false judgments. Perversely, the clinically depressed are often free of these cognitive illusions—they are, to use the subtitle of one of Abramson and Alloy’s best-known papers, “Sadder But Wiser.” Likewise, Shelley Taylor, a social psychologist, has studied the use of illusions by victims of trauma and illness. She found that like James’s mountaineer, those who are unjustifiably optimistic tend to live better-adjusted and happier lives than people faced with similar situations who are thoroughly realistic about their prospects. (Taylor’s book, *Positive Illusions*, provides an introduction to the subject of useful falsehoods.) Finally, Daniel Goleman, the author of *Vital Lies, Simple Truths*, and other neo-Freudians have argued that repression, the forgetting of unpleasant facts, plays

As a philosopher James preached the "will to believe"; as a man he was not always able to put this idea into practice. Drugs gave him the ability to do just that.

a crucial role in emotional health. Overall, the psychological consensus seems to be that there can be a reasonably widespread conflict between truth and happiness. The best beliefs, as James clearly intuited, are by no means the truest ones. (Toward the end of his life James came to use "true" almost as a synonym for "useful," but the early James had not yet taken this radical step.)

James's life was filled with eloquent demonstrations, both large and small, of this principle. Testifying before the Massachusetts legislature, in 1898, he opposed a bill that would have prohibited Christian Scientists from practicing their "mind-cures." "You

are not to ask yourselves whether these mind-curers really achieve the successes that are claimed," he told the lawmakers. "It is enough for you as legislators to ascertain that a large number of our citizens . . . are persuaded that a valuable new department of medical experience is by them opening up." On a more mundane level James supported the philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce, his friend and mentor, with money that was from his own pocket but that James claimed had been collected from Peirce's many "anonymous admirers." This was an ordinary white lie, but in the context of James's lifelong concern for the practical consequences of belief it resonates with unusual grandeur. James's genius can be described as an unwillingness to overlook the numerous instances of benign deception (and self-deception) that mark human life. With inspired audacity he suggested a link between these banal little deceptions and the grand, useful, and possibly false world views that characterize religious belief.

James's interest in drugs needs to be seen in this light. Although as a philosopher James preached the "will to believe," as a man he was not always able to put this idea into practice. Without nitrous oxide he was a cautious scientist whose skeptical nature prevented him from experiencing the religious joys that his philosophy celebrated. "My own constitution," he said, speaking of mystical experiences, "shuts me out from their enjoyment almost entirely." With the drug he became an inspired visionary whose rantings would surely turn a Beat poet green with envy.

No verbiage can give it, because the verbiage is *other*.
Incoherent, coherent—same.
 And it fades! And it's infinite! AND it's infinite! . . .
 Don't you see the difference, don't you see the identity?
 Constantly opposites united!
 The same me telling you to write and not to write!
 Extreme—extreme, extreme! . . .
 Something, and *other* than that thing!
 Intoxication, and *otherness* than intoxication.
 Every attempt at betterment,—every attempt at otherment,
 —is a—
 It fades forever and forever as we move.

Drugs, in short, gave James the theorist who dared people to believe what accorded with their needs the ability to do just that.

The Freedom to Believe

Americans, it is often remarked, are confused about drugs. The image of William Bennett giving up his cigarettes in order to lead the nation's War on Drugs exemplifies this confusion. We tolerate cigarettes and alcohol but prohibit the recreational use of similarly mild intoxicants, including marijuana. We pour billions of dollars into law enforcement but devote only a tiny fraction of this amount to the medical treatment and rehabilitation of drug addicts. Courts impose widely disparate punishments for the possession and use of chemically similar substances, notably crack and powdered cocaine. But perhaps the most egregious area of inconsistency involves religious drug use. Faced with the claim that drug use contributes importantly to religious belief, courts have made a number of confused and conflicting judgments.

In 1964 the California Supreme Court held that members of the Native American Church, an association of Native American groups all of whom use peyote in their religious rituals, had a First Amendment right to use the drug. In subsequent years the Native American Church obtained religious exemption from peyote restrictions in twenty-seven other states, though in a few instances, notably in a case before the Oregon Supreme Court, its arguments were rejected. Meanwhile, non-Native American requests for religious exemption from drug statutes have repeatedly been denied—including those of the Neo-American Church, which in 1968 claimed 20,000 members; the Universal Church of Christ Light, which used marijuana in its rituals; the Church of the Awakening, founded in 1963 by two retired osteopaths; the Native American Church of New York (of whose 1,000 members only a few were in fact Native Americans); Timothy Leary; and the Ethiopian Zion Coptic Church, a syncretic Jamaican group. Finally, in 1990, the U.S. Supreme Court rejected the claim that the First Amendment protected the Native American Church's use of peyote—in part, no doubt, because of the obvious double standard that was being ap-

plied. Congress retaliated in 1993 with the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, in effect reinstating both the Native American Church's right to use drugs in its religious rituals and the disturbing double standard.

The reasoning behind decisions that uphold the right to use drugs in a religious context is obvious: drugs play an important, even essential, role in the practice of many religious groups; the Constitution protects the free exercise of religious belief; therefore the Constitution protects the use of drugs. The reasoning behind decisions that reject the same right is that religious action, unlike religious belief, is not absolutely protected by the Constitution. The distinction was definitively articulated by Justice Owen Roberts in *Cantwell v. Connecticut* (1940). "The [First] Amendment," he wrote, "embraces two concepts—freedom to believe and freedom to act. The first is absolute but, in the nature of things, the second cannot be." Thus the law, though it does not seek to prevent people from having certain religious beliefs, may prevent them from acting on those beliefs. Courts have held, for instance, that prohibitions on polygamy apply to Mormons, and that even Christian snake-handling sects are subject to regulations controlling the treatment of dangerous animals. Since taking drugs is an action, it is thus subject to government regulation.

But is this the right way to look at the situation? William James used drugs not because he had religious beliefs that encouraged him to do so but in order to *generate* religious or mystical beliefs that he otherwise would not have had.

Looking back on my own experiences [with nitrous oxide], they all converge towards a kind of insight to which I cannot help ascribing some metaphysical significance. The keynote of it is invariably a reconciliation. It is as if the opposites of the world, whose contradictoriness and conflict make all our difficulties and troubles, were melted into unity. . . . This is a dark saying, I know, when thus expressed in terms of common logic, but I cannot wholly escape from its authority. I feel as if it must mean something, something like what the hegelian philosophy means, if one could only lay hold of it more clearly. Those who have ears to hear, let them hear; *to me the living sense of its reality only comes in the artificial mystic state of mind.* [Italics added.]

If we take this claim seriously, and if we also take seriously Justice Roberts's assertion that the "freedom to believe" is absolute, then we need to rethink the prevailing consensus about religious drug use. Taking drugs is an action, certainly, but actions that are necessary for the *production* of religious beliefs should not be conflated with actions taken *because of* religious beliefs that could exist regardless. James needed nitrous oxide in order to have his mystical belief. Did he then have a constitutional right to use the drug? Just how absolute is the freedom to believe?

More important, James's philosophy gives us a principled way to think about the relation between religion and drugs.

From a Jamesian perspective, religious toleration represents not just a commitment to individual freedom, not simply a hands-off policy on the part of the government toward questions of ultimate truth, but rather an affirmative decision to shelter certain useful though potentially false beliefs. Drug use, from this perspective, represents a similar sort of decision, but on the level of the individual rather than of the society. Just as a society might choose to nurture or tolerate certain sorts of illusions, pluralistically embracing both atheistic and religious subcultures, so, too, might an individual decide—as did James—to divide his or her life into periods of sober rationality and ecstatic religious intoxication. Drugs can allow even the most skeptical people, those who by constitution or upbringing are not susceptible to religious insights, to experience temporary periods of pleasing falsehood. Indeed, this is the real religious significance of drug use, from the Jamesian point of view—that it lets us choose, if only vaguely and temporarily, what to believe.

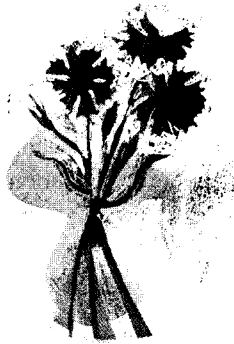
In 1977 Judge Jack Weinstein, of New York State, wrote,

Neither the trappings of robes, nor temples of stone, nor a fixed liturgy, nor an extensive literature or history is required to meet the test of beliefs cognizable under the Constitution as religious. So far as our law is concerned, one person's religious beliefs held for one day are presumptively entitled to the same protection as the beliefs of millions which have been shared for thousands of years.

These are generous words, and they should make us ask whether James's beliefs—held not for a day but for the mere minutes of his intoxication—warrant comparable charity. Can we learn to look at drug-induced illusion with enthusiastic Jamesian innocence? Is not the degree of self-control that pharmacology has given us remarkable? Prozac promises to change the hand that chemistry has dealt us, altering our moods to suit our needs. For James, drugs served a similar function: using nitrous oxide, he altered the beliefs that science had given him, experiencing if only for a brief time the pleasing illusions of the religious visionary.

Drugs, of course, are dangerous. They can destroy lives, families, and even whole communities. (James's own brother Robertson fought a long and losing battle with alcoholism.) The story of William James shows us how drugs can also contribute to human well-being, fulfilling in some instances an authentic religious need. Of course, our political culture is unprepared to recognize this. No doubt our courts will for the foreseeable future continue to deny that seekers like James might have a compelling religious interest in the use of drugs. Our politicians will continue to make perhaps unnaturally sharp distinctions: between the pleasing illusions of religious belief and those of intoxication; between the Native American's peyote and the non-Native American's nitrous oxide. A century after William James we have yet to catch up with him and his intoxicated nonsense. ☞

MORE MARRIAGES



CYCLE

What why when where who
I crush my wedding glass beneath my shoe

In with from to at
I kiss my bride & cry Jehoshaphat

Five four three two one
I father daughters & entomb a son

Minsk Flint Perth Seoul Rome
I travel far to find myself at home

Large squat thin fat small
I greet a stranger in a shopping mall

Taste touch smell hear see
I lose my wife my gentle Melanie

I take my life & shake it by the hair
Who what why when where

—JAMES REISS

PASSED ON

He lived in a sod house,
a formal nest of grass
that wove green thread
around his soul, a bed
of mud and cellulose.

And she was small. She
never grew; the empty
wind that blew and reared
had bent her to the plains she cared
so little for. But he,

he didn't seem to mind
her size, he'd found
a shape to love there;
and she was spare where
he was generous as sand, the kind

of man who drifted
like the yellow hills that lifted their
sloping shoulders to the bad
lands. For her, his mud
heart tumbled like the tufted

weeds that wheel along the plains,
that sea of mammoth bones,
that state all made of sky—
they married in July.
Her thin bouquet of corn

flowers remains the brightest thing
he'd ever see. I have her ring
now, a silver band so little
it won't slip over the knuckle
on my finger. How long

ago, a man gave his grass
soul to her in her brown dress—
and she was always stern,
too small and learned
to keep inside a sod house.

—ERIN BELIEU

THE WEDDING COUPLE

Fifteen years ago his heart
infarcted and he stopped smoking.

At eighty he trembled
like a birch but remained vigorous
and acute.

When they married,
fifty years ago, I was twelve.

I observed the white lace
veil, the mumbling preacher, and the flowers
of parlor silence
and ordinary absurdity; but

I thought I stood outside
the parlor.

For two years she dwindled
by small strokes
into a mannequin—speechless almost, almost
unmoving, eyes open
and blinking, fitful in perception—
but a mannequin that suffered
shame when it stained the bed sheet.

Slowly, shaking with purpose,
he carried her to the bathroom,
undressed and washed her,
dressed her in clean clothes, and carried her back
to CNN and bed. "All

you need is love," sang John and Paul:

He touched her shoulder; her eyes
caressed him like a bride's bold eyes.

—DONALD HALL

THE MARRIAGE IN THE TREES

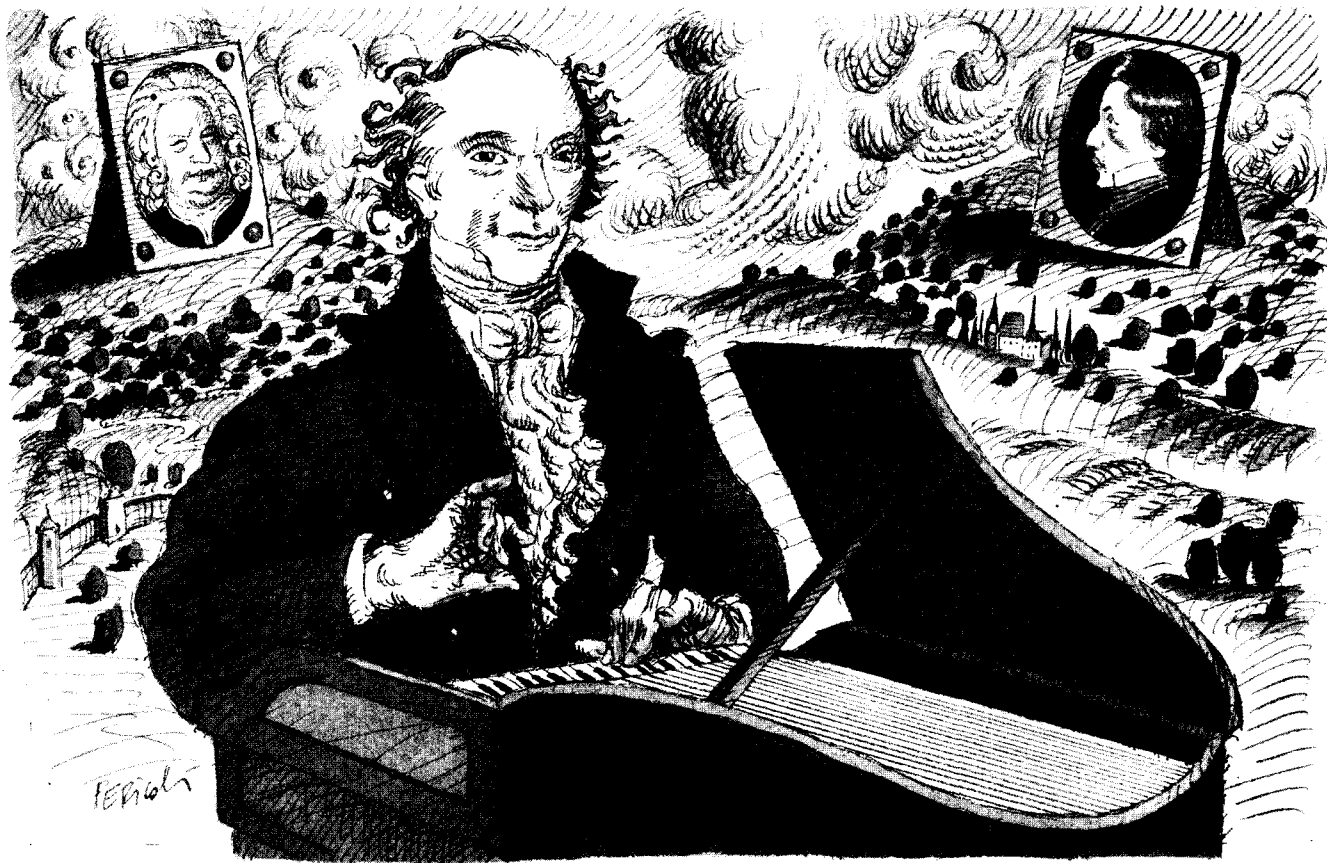
When the wind was right everything else
was wrong. The oak we thought built
better than the house split like a ship
on rock. We let it stand the winter,
spectral, shagged, every sky its snow,
then cut it down, dismantled it in
pieces like disease. Then limbs from
the yellow poplar broke at will—
fell from the heights like bones
of the Puritans; even to gather them
in bundles seemed puritanical.
And the willow, by its nature, wept
long tears of its overbranching,
so pale they were autumnal. These
we turned too easily to switches,
mocking the bickering in the spruce's
nesting eaves, which crows, then jays,
bothered all they could. The list,
the list. The sycamore made maps
of disappearance; the copper beech,
parental in its girth, was clipped
hard, by a car, with a wound that wouldn't
heal. Doctoring, then witchery, then
love—nothing we tried would work.
More apple trees that grew nowhere
but down. More maples spilling sugar.
More hawthorns blazing out, telling truth.

—STANLEY PLUMLY

POSTSCRIPT

As if hung by its hasp and dropped,
my mother's old letter chest lay
smashed, my father's ardent hand strewn
through neighbors' yards; for years I've grasped
after those bits of flapping snow.

—DEBRA PENNINGTON



Finished Symphonies

Clementi's neglected orchestral music is far better than his present reputation suggests

NO composer had a more fortunate life-span than Muzio Clementi. He was born in Rome in 1752, two years after Bach's death, while Handel was still an active figure on the musical scene of London, where Clementi would spend much of his life; he died in 1832, a year before the birth of Brahms, just as Berlioz, Chopin, Schumann, and Mendelssohn were getting their careers under way. In 1781 Clementi engaged in a piano com-

by William H. Youngren

petition with Mozart in Vienna, for the benefit of Emperor Joseph II; during the 1790s he shared the stage of London's Hanover Square Concert Rooms with the visiting Haydn; in 1807, once again in Vienna, he carried on elaborate negotiations with Beethoven that resulted in his becoming the composer's principal English publisher; and on June 21, 1824, he attended the London debut of Franz Liszt. During most of his life he was more famous than

Mozart, his reputation exceeded only by those of Haydn and Beethoven—both of whom he not only was influenced by but also influenced. In addition, Clementi was one of the premier keyboard virtuosos and teachers of his day, and he ran a highly successful publishing firm that also manufactured pianos. At his death he was buried with high ceremony in the cloisters of Westminster Abbey.

Yet today Clementi's name is scarcely known. His monumental *Gradus ad Parnassum* (1817–1826), once studied by all budding pianists, lives on only in Debussy's affectionate caricature, "Dr. Gradus ad Parnassum," from the *Children's Corner Suite*. During the 1950s Vladimir Horowitz's recordings briefly revived interest in some of Clementi's sonatas, but they, too, are no longer studied as they once were, and are seldom programmed.

His other music is in a still sorer state. Clementi wrote several vocal and chamber works and, most important, an unknown number of symphonies, which had a brief success but disappeared from the orchestral repertory in the late 1820s

—swept aside by the demand for Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven.

If Clementi's life-span was fortunate in that it put him in personal and artistic contact with perhaps the world's three greatest composers, it was unfortunate in that it put him in direct competition with them. His music for both keyboard and orchestra is far better than his present low reputation suggests. The three Viennese classical composers produced their astonishing body of masterpieces between the mid-1770s and 1827, the year of Beethoven's death—almost exactly the period during which Clementi was active as a composer.

That Clementi's symphonies should so long have remained unknown and unplayed, and that even their precise number and the dates of their composition should be obscure to us, is not only unjust but also ironic. For it was on these works that Clementi, especially during his later years, placed his greatest hopes for posthumous fame.

CLEMENTI had composed an oratorio and perhaps also a mass by the time he was twelve; by fourteen he had been appointed the organist of his local church. Shortly thereafter a visiting Englishman, Peter Beckford, struck a deal with Clementi's father whereby he "bought" (as he later put it) the young composer for seven years, to serve as his music master. Beckford, a cousin of the novelist William Beckford, the author of *Vathek*, had no special interest in music. But in 1765, the year before his trip to Rome, he inherited a large Dorset estate, and decided that his new position demanded a music master. So Clementi returned with him to England in 1766 or 1767. A few sonatas survive from this period, but Clementi seems to have spent most of his time in solitary study and experimentation, at his harpsichord. Just what he did to earn his keep, and when he left Dorset for London, are not known.

He seems to have arrived in London in about 1774, and by the end of the 1770s he was composing, performing, and publishing sonatas of ever-increasing brilliance and flamboyance. By 1780 he felt ready to try his luck on the Continent. Stopping first in Paris, he went on to Vienna and his confrontation with Mozart. Though Clementi had high praise for Mozart's "spirit and grace," Mozart, in a

letter to his father, ungenerously (and perhaps enviously) dismissed Clementi as possessing "not the slightest expression or taste, still less, feeling," and branded him "a *ciarlatano*, like all Italians."

In 1784 Clementi returned to the Continent and eloped with an eighteen-year-old girl he had met on his previous trip, the daughter of a prosperous Lyons merchant. The enraged father pursued the couple, and with the aid of the authorities soon reclaimed his daughter. Heartbroken, Clementi retired to Bern, where he consoled himself by working at mathematics. By late 1784 or early 1785 he felt sufficiently restored to return to London, but lingering melancholy apparently kept him from performing.

Clementi's rejection by the merchant brought it home to him that the trade of touring virtuoso was not quite respectable, and he resolved to set his sights higher. The Op. 13 sonatas, which he composed at this time, are decidedly less flamboyant, more nobly melodic and internally coherent, than his earlier ones. This was also when he began to write symphonies, which were rapidly becoming the most prestigious genre of musical composition. In 1786 four new Clementi symphonies (or parts of symphonies) were performed in London. Of these we have two, the short symphonies that were published in 1787 as Op. 18—the only orchestral works that Clementi ever allowed to be published.

In addition to raising his musical ambitions, Clementi now sought to better himself by going into business. He was becoming the most sought-after, and most expensive, piano teacher in London, and with the fortune thus amassed he invested heavily in music publishing and piano manufacture, two activities that increasingly absorbed his time and attention.

Clementi's turn toward orchestral music was also influenced by Haydn's two visits to London in the early 1790s. During the 1780s Clementi's symphonies were frequently performed, but Haydn's arrival in 1791 suddenly landed Clementi in a popularity contest he could not possibly win. When Haydn returned to Vienna, in 1793, Clementi's music was again in demand; his fortunes sank once again when Haydn reappeared in 1794, and rose the next year with the great man's final departure.

Although the two men maintained

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cordial relations—Haydn visited Clementi's country house at Evesham, in Worcestershire, and Clementi gave him a piece of coconut shell trimmed with silver—Haydn was a steady irritant to Clementi. But he must surely also have acted as inspiration and challenge, because Clementi kept writing symphonies. During the early years of the new century (and especially after he had become acquainted with Beethoven and his music) Clementi did his finest surviving symphonic work. From 1816 through 1824 a long string of mostly favorable reviews chronicles the performances of his symphonies in London, Paris, Munich, and Leipzig.

WHY were these later works not published in Clementi's lifetime? Apparently because he kept revising and tinkering with them. In his early days a fine youthful recklessness had led him to publish immediately almost everything he composed. But another effect of the reassessment brought on by his aborted elopement was to make Clementi far more cautious about the quality of the works he sent out into the world. Thus he veered from one extreme to the other, and became a compulsive reviser—at least of works to which he attached special importance, like the symphonies. He carried the scores with him on his far-flung promotional trips, and they were with him when he died.

The fate of these manuscripts is an obscure and tangled story. An old rumor had it that Clementi himself destroyed them. But in 1921 the musicologist Georges de Saint-Foix announced that by combining chunks of manuscript from two large Clementi collections, one in the British Museum and the other in the Library of Congress, he had made out four symphonies, an overture, and a minuet. A servant of the composer's grandson, one of the previous owners of the manuscripts, had evidently thrown out many by mistake; but much remained. In 1935 the composer Alfredo Casella reconstructed two of the symphonies and conducted them in Italy with great success. Performances were also given in this country, by the Boston Symphony Orchestra, and in 1938 Casella's editions of the two works were published.

In 1969 the musicologist and pianist Pietro Spada began working with the

manuscripts in London and Washington. He discovered connections among various fragments that Casella had missed. By 1978 Spada had published the four large symphonies that apparently date from 1810–1824, two so-called overtures that were intended as symphonic first movements, and a *Minuetto Pastorale*, on the manuscript of which Clementi had written, “to be shortened for another symphony in D.” Modern editions of the two Op. 18 symphonies and of a piano concerto that Clementi later turned into a sonata had appeared some years earlier, and so the publication of Clementi's surviving orchestral works was now complete.

The four large symphonies were recorded almost immediately by Claudio Scimone and the Philharmonia Orchestra, and are now available as a two-CD set (Erato 4509-92191-2). Within the past few years these symphonies, the two smaller Op. 18 symphonies, the concerto, the two overtures, and the *Minuetto Pastorale* have all appeared on the English ASV label, performed by Francesco D'Avalos and the Philharmonia, with Spada as soloist in the concerto. They can be had either on three single compact discs (ASV CD DCA 802, 803, and 804) or as a packaged set (ASV CD DCS 322).

The two early symphonies are uneven but extremely interesting experimental works, and are quite different from each other. The one in B flat sounds almost archaic when we recall that by 1787 Haydn had composed his six *Paris* symphonies (Nos. 82–87). Its first movement and finale have the curiously impersonal air of many pre-classical symphonies of a decade or more earlier. At only two points in the first movement does anything interesting happen: Clementi moves into and out of the development section with oddly meditative passages in which the melodic movement suddenly slows to a standstill and the harmony drifts.

The opening movement of the symphony in D, in contrast, is, as Leon Plantinga remarks in his excellent 1977 biography, *Clementi: His Life and Music*, “painstakingly unorthodox.” The allegro, following a solemn slow introduction, at first seems as energetically impersonal as that of the B-flat work. But the transition to the second theme is refreshingly contrapuntal, and the second theme itself, a slow-moving, thoughtful

melody given out softly by the upper strings, has an almost ethereal quality. The recapitulation, astonishingly, begins not in the expected D major but in C major. The contrapuntal transitional passage and the second theme swap places as Clementi gradually works his way back to the home key and a witty ending that surely owes its existence to Haydn. The finale is also delightfully Haydnesque.

The first movement of the C-major concerto is large-mannered, robust, and a little boring. This concerto was performed by Clementi in 1790 and was probably composed around that time, but it, too, sounds primitive. Our ears have grown accustomed to the dazzling series of twelve concertos (K. 449–K. 503) that Mozart wrote from 1784 to 1786, and we expect something like the subtle, ever-changing relation between soloist and orchestra that we find in those works. That relation is established by the very free, multi-thematic first-movement form Mozart evolved specifically for that purpose. Clementi instead employs the older first-movement concerto form, in which there are two expositions, one for the orchestra and one for the soloist, that are identical except for the key in which the second theme is introduced. When Clementi made this work into a sonata, all he had to do with the first movement was lop off the orchestral exposition and alter slightly the transitions to the development and the cadenza, and the last few bars. Anyone could have done it. But no one except Mozart could turn the first movement of a Mozart concerto into the first movement of a sonata. Clementi's second movement is more interesting: intimate and freely discursive, it reminds one of the nocturnes of Chopin and of Clementi's gifted pupil John Field. The finale is sparkling but somewhat prosaic.

THE heart of the matter is, of course, the four large symphonies edited by Spada. They are immediately attractive works, generous and warm-hearted yet without an ounce of sentimentality. Each lasts about half an hour—twice the length of the Op. 18 symphonies—and is scored for a sumptuous orchestra that includes three trombones.

As one would expect, there is a good deal of Haydn in these works. In fact, many of the fast movements sound at

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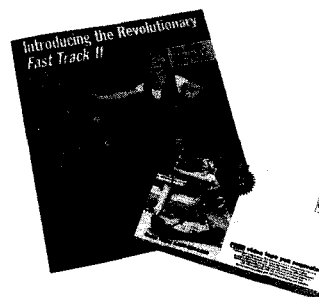
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first like Haydn movements in which the intensity of the wit has been diffused, the exhilarating tightness of the form relaxed, and the form itself opened to allow time for enjoyment and contemplation. Often Clementi dramatically produced a startling chord that in Haydn would signal the opening of a whole new harmonic area, but then simply picked up where he left off; the chord becomes merely a local effect rather than a functional part of the harmonic progression.

Clementi's main way of broadening and relaxing the classical forms was to provide sudden moments of calm or even stasis. These mysterious "still points," which first appeared in the Op. 18 symphonies, are everywhere in the four late works. They may derive from but are quite different from Haydn's famous "irregularities"—the sudden pauses, shifts of direction, and lengthenings or shortenings of phrases by which Haydn created momentary surprises and delights without losing his grip on the underlying form. At such moments Clementi seems to have been quite willing to lose his grip for a while.

It is this willingness, together with his harmonic procedures and the character of some of his melodies, that makes it natural to group these symphonies with Schubert's first six, the symphonies and sonatas of Carl Maria von Weber, the concertos and sonatas of Mozart's pupil Johann Nepomuk Hummel, and the symphonies of Louis Spohr. In these works and others written during the first quarter of the nineteenth century the classical forms of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven remain more or less unaltered externally but are softened and tamed through a heightened concentration on local color and ornamental detail, a tendency toward lushness of harmony and sonority, and an easygoing pace.

Since these had been elements of Clementi's music for a long time, it is no surprise that he should have made common cause with these proto-Romantic or "classicizing" composers. Yet he differs from them in one important respect: he belongs to an earlier musical generation. Schubert was born in 1797, Weber in 1786, Hummel in 1778, Spohr in 1784; Clementi (it is believed) published his first sonatas in 1771, and he had been composing for perhaps a decade before

that. He was old enough to have been directly influenced by Bach and Handel. As early as perhaps 1774 he acquired an autograph manuscript of the second volume of the *Well-Tempered Clavier*, and during his early years at Dorset he continually studied and practiced the works of J. S. and C. P. E. Bach. The contrapuntal language of the High Baroque was still, for Clementi, a living medium of expression—not, as for Mendelssohn, an ancient tongue to be reverently learned and preserved.

Thus we find in Clementi's four late symphonies vigorous and elaborate canonic and fugal sections cheek by jowl with the leisurely, ornate passages that remind us of Weber and early Schubert. During his lifetime Clementi was much praised by the English critics for his "science," by which they meant his contrapuntal technique. A slightly later critic like Schumann—not only a German but also a Romantic composer—could express concern about the apparent coldness of Clementi's contrapuntal writing. It was Clementi's unique historical position—together, of course, with the special bent of his enormous gifts—that enabled him to temper and qualify classical forms with both the contrapuntal rigors of the vanished Baroque age and the harmonic languors of the dawning Romantic age. There is no one quite like him, and no other works quite like these four extraordinary symphonies.

They come off better in Scimone's recordings than in those conducted by D'Avalos. D'Avalos takes them in the lean, brisk style now considered the guarantee of "authenticity" in the performance of all late-eighteenth-century and early-nineteenth-century music; Scimone moves easily between vigor and expansiveness, just as the works demand. I would fault Scimone only on his failure to capture the full effect of Clementi's superb orchestration, in particular the almost Brahmsian richness provided by the three trombones and by the thick lower voicings of which Clementi (as in his solo keyboard works) was so fond. The thought of what performances by, say, Claudio Abbado and the Berlin Philharmonic might reveal redoubles one's hopes that these symphonies of Clementi's will soon receive the airing, in the concert hall as well as on records and discs, that they deserve. ☼

The Idea of Disorder at Key West

*Floating bodies, nefarious schemes,
things that go bang! in the night: the fiction of south Florida,
from Hemingway to Hiaasen, feeds on local fact*

by Phyllis Rose

BEFORE my husband had his green card, Key West was the farthest south we knew we could go without having to re-enter the United States from foreign soil. So one could say we came to Key West to escape the law.

We're not the only ones. Something about the configuration of land and water—the puniness of the one, the immensity of the other—seems to challenge society's ability to enforce its laws, inviting crime. That, and the difficulty of dragging a living out of the sea. It has al-

ways been more rewarding for fishermen to haul people and forbidden goods than to net kingfish or shrimp.

Local people learn to keep their mouths shut about what they see. If packages fall from the air, if people parachute into the mangroves and powerboats zoom from nowhere to pick them up, best to say nothing about it. On a typical dark night off Marathon, three "lobster fishermen" were arrested for smuggling. Customs radar tracked a plane heading from South America to the Gulf of Mexico. Trackers

saw it drop twelve bales of cocaine—800 pounds—into the water near the boat *Bad Habits*. They saw men retrieve the bales, and then dump them overboard again when their boat was intercepted by a Navy hydrofoil. Locals call bales of drugs that have been dumped in haste and can sometimes be retrieved "square grouper." Some sport T-shirts that say SAVE THE BALES.

It was little different sixty years ago. In the mid-1930s, before the great hurricane, a young couple, Russell and Charlotte



Niedhawk, pioneered a deserted key two hours by boat from Miami. The Niedhawks raised limes, which they sold in Miami, but almost everyone who crossed their path was a rumrunner or a smuggler of what they called "dope and aliens."

Charlotte kept a diary of their life on Elliott Key in 1934–1935, a deadpan record of resilience in the face of extremity. One day a friend turned up distraught. His friend and business partner, Leown, had been found drowned, without the life jacket he always wore. Leown's boat and load of contraband liquor had disappeared. A few days later a ne'er-do-well named Little Augie arrived at Elliott Key, boasting about hijacking a load of rum and pushing the rumrunner out of the boat after cutting off his life vest. How does one entertain a man who boasts of murder? The Niedhawks, fearing to provoke Little Augie, said that his story was very interesting, but that they were tired and had to go to bed. They barred the bedroom door and made the murderer breakfast, probably their signature chocolate-and-coconut pancakes, the next day. Eventually someone killed Little Augie in his turn.

One night Russ went to a bar near Miami and met "a little pudgy guy" with sailor's chin whiskers who kept buying him imported beer and pumping him for stories. This was Ernest Hemingway, the original bard of south Florida. Writers have been pumping locals for Keys stories ever since.

HEMINGWAY lived in Key West for eight years, in an enormous house that his wealthy wife, Pauline, had bought for him. She added to it a huge and expensive swimming pool, at a time when the cisterns that would later be turned into the miniature pools of Key West were still being used to hold rainwater. Even now few pools are much bigger than small. Key West is not a good place for conspicuous consumption. Space is at a premium, and the island's tone has always been set by the military, which has had a large presence, and by the poor and raffish—fishermen, wreckers, and sailors. For a long time Cuban cigars were manufactured in Key West, and many of the houses were built for workers in those factories. Almost all are small and crowded on top of one another. Hemingway's house is an anomaly.

His Key West fiction is anomalous too. The only novel he set in Key West, *To Have and Have Not*, concerns the "haves" more than it should, perhaps because of Hemingway's deep resentment of the wealthy people who were his benefactors. He seems to have seen Key West as a place where the rich tied up their yachts and got drunk. The portrait doesn't ring true, and anyone who has not read *To Have and Have Not* recently has probably forgotten that part of it, leaving only the story of the rumrunning charter-boat captain Harry Morgan, the "I'm no hero" guy whose innate decency and romanticism surface, and who becomes a hero because of the war. In the movie starring Humphrey Bogart, Harry risks his life and boat to help enemies of the Vichy regime in the Caribbean. In Key West one has only to walk over to Garrison Bight, where the charter boats now tie up, to find Morgan's equivalents, people struggling for a living on the sea and whose lives from time to time may be raised to a higher pitch—or sunk forever—by historical circumstance.

There were many of them at the time of the Mariel boatlift. Key West is only ninety miles from Cuba. (A mayor of Key West once water-skied there to demonstrate its proximity, in a successful effort to persuade the Navy not to abandon its Key West station. It took him six hours. A Cuban windsurfing instructor at one of the beach resorts, deciding on the spur of the moment to defect, windsurfed to the Keys in nine hours.) In 1980, following Castro's announcement that anyone who wanted to could leave Cuba, charter boats hired by Cuban-Americans desperate to get their relatives out of Cuba made the crossing easily, but were then kept in Mariel harbor until the captains' money had been exhausted by paying for supplies at ruinous prices. Castro loaded the boats with criminals and inmates of his prisons. It took wit and skill for the captains to survive the blockade, get out of the harbor, and navigate home in their overloaded boats. At first the U.S. government applauded the boatlift, calling it a humanitarian effort; but between the time the boats set off and the time they returned, the government changed course, deplored the boatlift, and decided to punish the captains who participated. Some came back to face \$8,000 fines and the impounding of their

boats. Ten years later the Justice Department was still pursuing a few of them.

How about this for what might have happened to Hemingway's Harry Morgan had he lived in the 1990s? Two men tried to hire a boat out of Key West, ostensibly to do some fishing. They had cash but no credit cards, so none of the rental companies would do business with them. Nor would most of the charter captains. The men looked Cuban, and it was feared that they would hijack the boat to go to Cuba. One captain agreed to take the two men out. A large, powerful man, he felt he could handle anything. When his boat did not return to Key West that night, people were concerned. His body washed up the next day. His boat was found drifting with the two Cubans still aboard, out of fuel. They claimed the captain had jumped overboard of his own free will.

More often than I could have imagined, bodies wash ashore on the Florida Keys, some intact, some deteriorated in the salt water, some eaten by sharks. Once, a young Hispanic woman's body washed ashore, her only identifying mark her T-shirt. A week later another body was found, shark-devoured, but with enough left to show that the man had been a pilot. Eventually the story was pieced together. Eight people had stuffed themselves into a single-engine vintage biplane that had been used as a crop duster in Cuba, and tried to make it to Miami. They got within five miles of the Florida coast, but the plane went down and all eight died.

The following month a raft succeeded where the plane had failed. The previous month a helicopter had made it. Since then, famously, a pilot has flown back to Cuba and picked up his wife and son on a highway. On one day in February of 1994, 106 people from Cuba landed on Stock Island, a record. People hurled themselves at the Florida Straits as though they were the Berlin Wall, but ninety miles wide and watery. The East Martello Museum, in Key West, exhibits a raft that Cuban refugees used: a few branches strapped together, a sapling mast, rags for a sail—as stable for people as a coconut shell would be for a cat.

It isn't only Cubans. Two years ago a boatload of Haitians paid a smuggler to bring them to the States. The smuggler made the crossing but dropped them off 200 feet from the shore. Four people

drowned, including two children. Bodies dotted the beach. The smuggler, a West Palm Beach man, was convicted of alien-smuggling and negligent homicide.

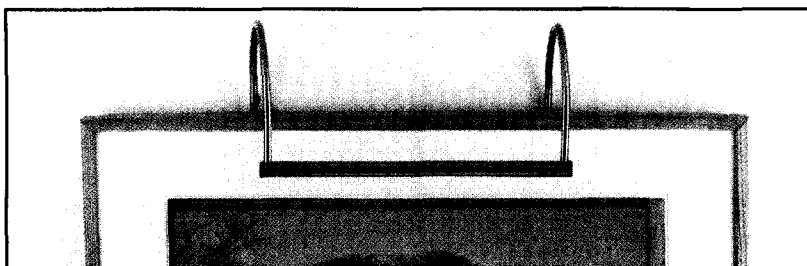
Here's what can happen to a Samaritan. A Miami fisherman raised enough money to outfit his boat to go after conch. Near Cuba he came upon an overloaded refugee boat, foundering. He carried the refugees aboard his fishing boat and carried them to the Dominican Republic. The Cubans refused to leave the boat, insisting they be taken to Miami. If they disembarked anywhere else, they would have a hard time claiming political asylum in the States. They stayed on the boat for three weeks, overloading its facilities. They clogged the plumbing and broke the air-conditioning. The captain lost his contract for conch and was bankrupted.

SUCH is the narrative climate of south Florida, and it nourishes the imaginations of writers as the warmth and water nourish their bodies. The boat-nappings, the insanely risky dashes to freedom, the efforts to comply with—or evade—laws that are always changing, the good deed that doesn't go unpunished: such material feeds the imagination as schools of little minnows feed groupers and snappers that in turn serve as food for larger fish.

The current bard in chief of south Florida's chaos is Carl Hiaasen, who is also a columnist for the *Miami Herald*. His dialogue, pacing, and grit are reminiscent of those of Elmore Leonard, himself a splendid chronicler of Miami vice, but Hiaasen's satire and sense of the region's looniness are unique. His thriller *Skin Tight* opens with two tourists in Miami who think they have sighted a porpoise. When it washes closer to shore, it turns out to be a body, dead from a gash in the chest. The tourists take a picture anyway. Although they do not know it, the murder weapon was a mounted blue marlin. Later in the book a bad man who loses his hand to a barracuda decides that replacement with a plastic hand is too banal and gets a Weed Whacker attached instead. And in the finale a confrontational talk-show host, Reynaldo Flemm, arranges a televised showdown with the murderous plastic surgeon Rudy Graveline by having his own nose done, on camera.

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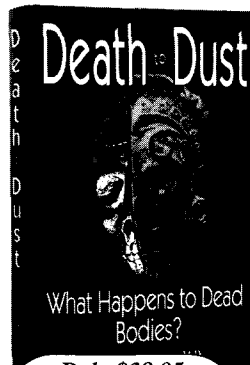
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of vacationers and retirees and return it to a state of nature are financed by a member of the Seminole Nation who has become a multimillionaire by running bingo games on Indian land. The terrorists call themselves Las Noches de Diciembre, imitating other groups that name themselves after famous revolutionary events. But the public gets it wrong, and, to the terrorists' fury, people keep calling them "the Nachos." I have seen people actually laugh out loud reading Hiaasen's novels, which often pit rabid developers, who show no concern for the environment, against rabid environmentalists, who show no concern for human life. In *Native Tongue* a central part is played by mango voles, indistinguishable from the common rat except by their blue tongues and the fact that they are endangered. A group of wealthy old ladies called The Mothers of Wilderness will go to any lengths to save them, and a theme-park owner, frustrated by his rivalry with Disney (his arm is tattooed with an image of Minnie Mouse giving Mickey a blow job), will go to any lengths to exploit them. Guess who's more ruthless.

Like all fine satirists, Hiaasen makes one start to see daily life through his eyes. A few acres of aboriginal wetlands are preserved behind the Key West airport because, when the bulldozers started to roll for yet another condo development, they discovered a couple of birds that bred nowhere else. Am I remembering this correctly or did I read it in a Hiaasen novel? A story headlined "FOWL PLAY IS AVERTED AS KEYS NATURE LOVERS FOIL OSPREY-NAPPERS" told how two thieves, intent on stealing young ospreys from one of the spectacular nests atop telephone poles along Route 1 in the Keys, were confronted by a crowd of outraged motorists who stopped when they saw what was going on. The thieves fled, but the nature-lovers, like avenging Furies, phoned their license-plate number to the police, and they were arrested and charged with harming protected wildlife. In recent news a man was fined when his pig sexually assaulted a Harley-Davidson; and a female captain, after her charter boat was intentionally rammed by a hell-bent tourist, said, "I was violated, and the weapon was a jet ski." Again, did these things really happen or is Carl Hiaasen making it all up? *Stormy Weather*, his most recent novel, depicts the chi-

canery and mayhem that followed Hurricane Andrew into the region south of Miami, and reading it I thought I knew what it would be like in heaven to have Swift, Voltaire, and Hieronymus Bosch commenting on the evening news.

There are other good novelists of south Florida, although none has as broad a social view and as powerful a satiric vision as Carl Hiaasen. Among others, I especially like Laurence Shames, John Leslie, and James W. Hall. Hall, who had published several volumes of poetry (poetry!), suddenly, in 1987, started turning out taut, tough, beautifully written crime novels set in the Keys and Miami. *Under Cover of Daylight*, his first, *Tropical Freeze*, his second, and *Mean High Tide*, his fifth, feature Thorn, a maladjusted, laid-back loner who is roused every now and then to involve himself in life, usually in order to avenge the murder of a loved one, before lapsing back into his favored activity, fly-tying, in his favorite place, the backwoods mangroves. *Under Cover of Daylight* has Thorn avenging the murder of his foster mother, Captain Kate Truman, who has been brutally raped and killed by a couple of psychopathic soi-disant yellowtail fishermen who chartered her boat. The helplessness of people on boats and islands, their inability to rely on any kind of law, is one of the staples of south Florida fiction—along with the razor-thin line between law and disorder: Captain Kate had been smuggling marijuana in order to finance her fight against a real-estate development.

IF the fight against real-estate developers seems to be a recurrent theme in south Florida fiction, that's because it is a major theme in south Florida life. Real-estate development is about the only legal way for local people to get rich. They are reviled for this by many people who have moved to south Florida after making their money elsewhere.

To protest a Navy housing development in Peary Court, one of the last parcels of open land on Key West, a well-known local figure named Harry Powell wrapped himself with explosives and blocked a bulldozer. Powell was disarmed, arrested, jailed, and denied bail; saving Harry Powell became for a while a hot local issue. It was embarrassing for people like me, who don't approve of live explosives in residential neighbor-

hoods, to admit that we had less than full sympathy for Harry Powell. We were expected to applaud the principle of protest and, at almost any cost, the opposition to development.

You may wonder—many do—why the Navy wanted to put up a 160-unit housing development at a time when it is reducing its presence in Key West. Answers I heard give a glimpse into the local Weltanschauung. Answer 1: It's the nature of bureaucracies to spend money, whether or not there is any purpose to it. Answer 2: You watch—in five years the Navy will bow out of Peary Court and sell it to the city. The city will run it for two years as low-income housing and then sell it for peanuts to some real-estate developers, who will turn around and sell the units as condos for exorbitant sums of money, making a fortune and enriching certain Navy officers and city officials as well.

The second answer is the stuff of which south Florida fiction is made. In the face of complex and contorted evil, evil that gives big to local charities and may even have a seat on the city council, the soul will always yearn for a simple if sullied solution, a Zen hero like James Hall's Thorn, a reluctant Samaritan like Hemingway's Harry Morgan. This is the satisfaction provided by all the hero-heavy thrillers and crime books. A more original literary response doesn't hawk effective action or an individual who sets disorder to rights; rather it creates order through clarity of vision and a-plague-on-both-your-houses humor. This is the way of Carl Hiaasen.

As American literature enters a new age of regionalism, following the path blazed by cuisine, south Florida's novels should start getting as much respect as its jerk chicken, mango salsa, and coconut-ginger rice. Just as the food is enriched by a distinctive conjunction of cultures and climate, so is the fiction enriched by distinctly regional themes: the fragility of law in the face of nature; the tug-of-war between idealism and economic necessity; the tendency of all ideology to produce brutality; the tendency of the absence of ideology to produce brutality; the urge, perhaps elicited more powerfully here than elsewhere, to drop out and let the personality subside into its constitutive disorder, like a water-ski-er losing the towrope and sinking, with no resistance, beneath the waves. ☼



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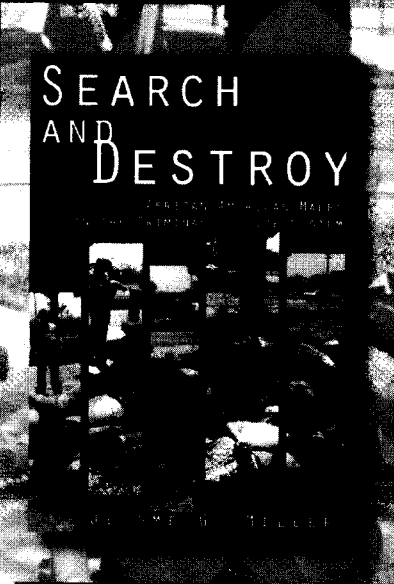
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Jerome G. Miller

The war on drugs has created an explosion in the American prison population, with the number of prison inmates now threatening to exceed the number of students attending college. Whether by design or not, this increase has been characterized by a severely disproportionate number of African American males. In *Search and Destroy*, Miller contends that the drug war's racial bias has exacerbated an already-present bias throughout the criminal justice system. The entire system, he argues, cascades from a greater likelihood of blacks' initial encounter with the justice system to an increased likelihood of incarceration for longer and longer periods. In a wide-ranging survey, Miller describes bias among police officers, probation officers, courts, social scientists whose data form the basis for much public policy toward crime, and social workers whose responsibility is purportedly toward members of the underclass. He warns that the sudden rekindling of interest in genetics and crime holds even greater danger for racial minorities in their encounters with the justice system.

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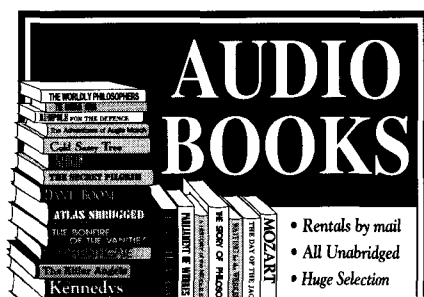
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What Election '96 Should Be About

by Jack Beatty

**FAT AND MEAN:
The Corporate Squeeze
of Working Americans
and the Myth of Managerial
"Downsizing"**

by David M. Gordon.

Martin Kessler Books/The Free Press,
336 pages, \$23.00.

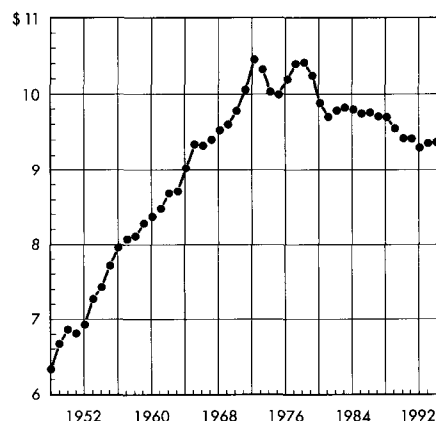
As an editor of Basic Books in the 1970s and 1980s, Martin Kessler, a political economist by training, who died earlier this year, published the two most influential public-policy books of that era: Lester Thurow's seminal analysis of the stagflation economy, *The Zero-Sum Society* (1981), the most resonantly titled book since *Catch-22*, and George Gilder's *Wealth and Poverty* (1981), which became the bible of supply-side economics. How fitting that one of Kessler's last books should be David Gordon's *Fat and Mean*, which analyzes the overriding economic problem of the 1990s—falling wages and living standards—with Thurowlike brilliance and scholarship and Gilderlike vigor, originality, and optimism. Yes, optimism, for notwithstanding all the bad news it purveys, *Fat and Mean* shows how the American Dream can be recovered.

The Dorothy H. Hirshon Professor of Economics at Manhattan's New School for Social Research, David Gordon (a valued contributor to *The Atlantic* who, sadly, died in March, at the age of fifty-one) was conceived in economics. His parents were both economists: Robert Aaron Gordon served as president of the American Economic Association, and Margaret Gordon was an expert on trade and migration. With Samuel Bowles, of the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, and Thomas E. Weisskopf, of the University of Michigan, David Gordon was a co-au-

thor of *Beyond the Waste Land: A Democratic Alternative to Economic Decline* (1983) and *After the Waste Land: A Democratic Economics for the Year 2000* (1990), and of a number of highly influential technical papers in professional journals. On this reader, at any rate, *After the Waste Land* made algebraic demands; its complexity got in the way of its prescient theme (the wasteful reality of the vauntedly efficient private sector). *Fat and Mean* is no less indebted to the newest and most sophisticated research in economics, but it assumes its debts much more lightly. The book is a model not just of social-science research but of economic thinking. Testing hypotheses logically and empirically, setting arguments against counterarguments, Gordon vindicated his discipline.

"The American economy has been failing most of its people. Why?" Gordon's answer is the crux of his book, but for those who still doubt the truth of his assertion, one chart is worth a thousand words. It shows what has happened to real spendable hourly earnings for "production/nonsupervisory employees in the private nonfarm sector"—average workers.

Real Spendable Hourly Earnings (\$1994)



"The bottom line is clear," Gordon wrote.

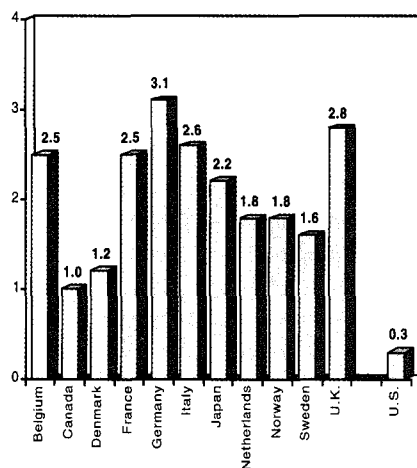
... over the past twenty years, real hourly take-home pay for production and nonsupervisory workers—representing more than 80 percent of all wage-and-salary employees—has declined by more than 10 percent. *The economy has grown massively since the mid-1960s, but workers' real spendable wages are no higher now than they were almost thirty years ago* [emphasis added].

Since 1979 only two categories of

workers have seen their real hourly earnings increase: college graduates, who make up just 20 percent of the work force, by 3.5 percent; and those with post-graduate degrees, by 8.8 percent. People with only "some college education" lost 15.9 percent of their hourly earnings, while high school dropouts lost 20.6 percent. Of production and nonsupervisory workers in major industry sectors, construction workers lost 20.7 percent, manufacturing workers 10.1 percent, transportation and public utilities workers 15.2 percent, and retail workers 17.4 percent. Only workers in finance, insurance, real estate, and other services (with or without college degrees) saw any increase in their real hourly wages.

It is often said that wages are falling in all the industrial countries, not just in the United States. That is a counsel of pernicious complacency. Besides, it's not true, and this Bureau of Labor Statistics chart proves it.

Percent Change, Real Hourly Compensation,
All Manufacturing Employees, 1973-1993



The chart—which, because it includes supervisory employees in manufacturing and not just ordinary workers, shows an anemic gain in wages—returns us to Gordon's question: Why?

There are two standard answers. One is globalization. U.S. wages are falling because the new world market for goods and labor is forcing them down. But to judge by the chart, the same new world market has not kept wages as flat in the other industrial countries. So, while globalization may have made its contribution, it can hardly be the major cause of the collapse in American wages. Moreover, the "trade-and-wages argument"—imports from low-wage countries caused

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The Legacy of Yitzhak Rabin

Which direction for Israel in the wake of his assassination?

Yitzhak Rabin was an Israeli patriot and military hero. His assassination was an almost intolerable blow to his country, to Jews in Israel and in the United States, and to people all over the world. Now that the first shock has passed, it may be time to assess his legacy.

What are the facts?

Background of the "peace process": Rabin's party was elected on the strength of its leader's promise to end the intifada. He did also promise that he would never negotiate with the PLO; that he would not yield sovereignty over the Israeli heartland of Judea/Samaria (the "West Bank"); that he would not allow a Palestinian state to be created; that he would never yield the Golan Heights; and that Jerusalem would forever remain Israel's undivided capital. But, his foreign minister, Shimon Peres, was in secret negotiations with the PLO culmi-

nating in that historical handshake in Washington, D.C. Prime Minister Rabin proceeded with the implementation of this "peace process". He was well aware of the strategic importance of the "West Bank". Whatever the pressures, he would never have given up military control over that area nor of the Golan Heights.

Shimon Peres is now prime minister. Unfortunately, he is pursuing a much more heedless approach to the "peace process". There is now little question that full control over the "West Bank" will be transferred to the PLO, to Arafat and to his 30,000 soldiers (disguised as policemen), and that a Palestinian state will come into existence in the "West Bank" and in Gaza; that the Golan will be handed over to Syria, and that Jerusalem, will be divided. There now seems to be a headlong rush into "peace at any price", without proper consideration for Israel's security interests and ultimately for its survival.

Life-and-death decisions without a mandate: The Knesset "parliamen-

tary" majority of the Labor Party is paper-thin: 61/59. It is on the basis of this minimal majority that Mr. Peres now arrogates to himself the power of decision to change the borders of and to truncate his country. A clear mandate, a super-majority in parliament or in a plebiscite should be required to make such life-and-death decisions. Of the 61 votes in favor of the government, five belong to Arab parties. Especially since the Labor party elevated the PLO terror organization to respectability, Israeli Arabs, mostly disaffected in any case—do not identify with and do not promote the interests of Israel, the Jewish state. They

identify with and promote the interests of the PLO and of the hoped-for Palestinian state. It is clear that, before

too long, the Israeli Arabs, who are concentrated in Galilee, will demand severance from Israel and "Anschluss" to the new state of Palestine, thus further carving up Israel and contributing to its strategic disadvantage. If, as seems now to be foreordained, Mr. Peres will yield the Golan to Syria, and with the "West Bank" in hostile Arab hands, Israel will be mortally weakened and virtually indefensible. The declared aim of the PLO, clearly stated in its covenant and never rescinded, is the destruction of Israel. The Arabs have recognized that, at least at present, that cannot be done by military means. The strategy, therefore, is the destruction of Israel in stages—first, by creating a Palestinian state in any territory that can be taken over through Israeli acquiescence, and then to foment an all-out assault against the critically vulnerable Jewish state. The policies of the current Israeli government seem to have made that goal more attainable.

The deluded fool who assassinated Yitzhak Rabin has accomplished the exact opposite of what he had intended. After having suffered more Arab terror casualties since the handshake than in any comparable period, the Israeli public had become disenchanted with the "peace process". It was expected that the Labor government would be defeated in the coming elections. Because of Rabin's martyrdom, it is now quite possible that another Labor government will be elected and that the "peace process" will be continued, with the fateful results it may entail for Israel. One can only hope that Israelis, in homage to the slain premier, will take a very hard look at the flawed policies of Shimon Peres and at the "peace process" and its almost inevitable consequences, before it's too late.

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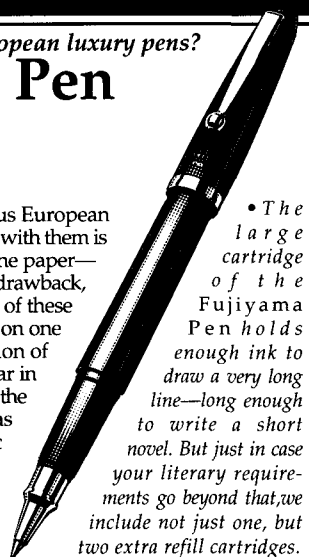
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U.S. wages, especially in manufacturing, to fall—has an elementary flaw. Gordon wrote that "the bulk of our trade deficit in merchandise exports and imports, which consists almost entirely of manufactured goods" is with countries whose manufacturing wages are higher than ours.

The second standard answer is what Gordon called the "skills-mismatch" or "technology" argument. Secretary of Labor Robert Reich is the leading proponent of this argument, which according to Gordon is the only serious explanation other than global trade which economics offers for the wage crisis. To quote Reich: "[There is a] mismatch between the skills Americans have and the skills the economy requires." This certainly fits with the fact that Americans with college or post-graduate degrees are doing much better than those without them. Thus the answer to the wage crisis is to raise the skill level of the nonsupervisory work force.

That's logical enough—and a good idea in any case. But, Gordon's critical review of the literature demonstrates, the technology argument has only circumstantial evidence to support it—as its more candid proponents concede. Grant, for example, that computerization brought about the relative increase in the earnings of computer-literate college grads. Computerization caught on in the mid-1980s. "But the real earnings of male college graduates actually began to fall in absolute terms after 1987," Gordon wrote, as the wage crisis crept up the income scale. In fact, from 1983 to 1993 real hourly wages fell or stagnated for those workers the Bureau of Labor Statistics identified as "computer operators" and "engineering technicians," while they climbed 31.2 percent for doctors and 29.7 percent for lawyers and judges—hardly high-tech professionals. After raising a cluster of similarly persuasive objections to the skills-mismatch explanation for the wage crisis, Gordon asked, "Have we found a modern version of the story about the emperor with no clothes?"

But if "trade" and "technology" at best only begin to explain the wage crisis, then what really explains it?

THE title of Gordon's first chapter gives the game away: his villain is "corporate bloat." Thus *Fat*, which was created to implement a corporate strategy—namely, *Mean*. Since the early

1970s, when wages started their long dip down, American corporations have been following a "Big Stick" strategy toward their production and nonsupervisory employees. Corporate America's response to global competition has been to get tough on unions; to lobby hard and successfully against meaningful increases in the minimum wage; to invent new categories of workers—contingent, part-time, temporary—who typically get no health insurance or other benefits and can be hired and fired as needed. At the same time, it has bulked up with managers and supervisors to monitor employees whose morale has fallen apace with their wages. Gordon explained the logic of the Big Stick this way:

Can't trust your workers when left to their own devices? Peer over their shoulders. Watch behind their backs. Record their movements. Monitor them. Supervise them. Boss them. Above all else, don't leave them alone. As one recent study observed, "American companies tend, fundamentally, to mistrust workers, whether they are salaried employees or blue-collar workers."

There are about 17 million monitors and supervisors, not including their secretaries and assistants. They cost the economy \$1.3 trillion in compensation in 1994, or four times the cost of Social Security, and almost exactly what the federal government collected in all taxes in 1994. This "bureaucratic burden" is equivalent to \$1.00 of a \$5.00 six-pack, or \$4,000 of a \$20,000 car. Of the industrial economies in Gordon's sample, none, except tragically propinquant Canada's, carries anything like as heavy a burden. Whereas 13 percent of U.S. non-farm workers are managerial and administrative employees, according to the *Yearbook of Labour Statistics*, only 4.2 percent of Japanese workers, 3.9 percent of German workers, and 2.6 percent of Swedish workers are in that category. Had we held our bureaucratic burden to the Japanese percentage, Gordon calculated, about 10 million workers would have been freed—none dare call it "downsized"—to do something more valuable in the economy (which almost anything other than implementing a wasteful strategy would be), realizing a possible "corporate bureaucratic dividend" of some half a trillion dollars.

The bureaucratic burden mirrors the decline in wages for the 80 percent of the work force—as it rises, they fall—that is not in the Fat. (To quote Gordon, "Men who worked at least eight out of ten years as managers during the 1980s earned 68 percent more than the average earnings for all male workers.") Since 1947 the number of managers and supervisors has exploded by 360 percent, but it was only in the early 1970s, with the arrival of the Big Stick, that the burden began to get really heavy. "And for this strategy to work, the power of the stick-wielders had to be enhanced," Gordon wrote, noting "a massive income shift, within the total category of wage-and-salary employee compensation, from production and nonsupervisory earnings to nonproduction and supervisory salaries." This income shift, all but ignored in the media, was about seven times as large as the defense buildup of the Carter-Reagan years. Gordon cited observations from Malcolm Baldrige, who was a Secretary of Commerce in the Reagan Administration, and Peter Drucker on what the latter called the "gross overweight around the midriff" of U.S. corporations. On becoming the chief executive officer of General Electric in the early 1980s John Welch said, "We were hiring people [just] to read reports of people who had been hired to write reports."

Hasn't the "downsizing" scythe of the nineties cut this Fat away? Not yet. Whereas a total of 2.5 million Americans have lost their jobs owing to corporate restructuring since 1991, the percentage of managers among nonfarm employees rose from 12.6 in 1989 to 13.6 in 1995. Although many middle managers have been let go, even more production workers have too, allowing the percentage of managers to grow. Gordon, complementing the view that James Fallows expresses about the out-of-touch media in his new book, *Breaking the News*, wrote, "The media appear to pay disproportionate attention to downsizing toward the top rungs of the occupational hierarchy because these workers are disproportionately their friends and relatives and readers and listeners." Inconveniently for Gordon's thesis (and for a small city's worth of families), 1996 began with news of AT&T's plans to lay off thousands of mostly managerial employees.

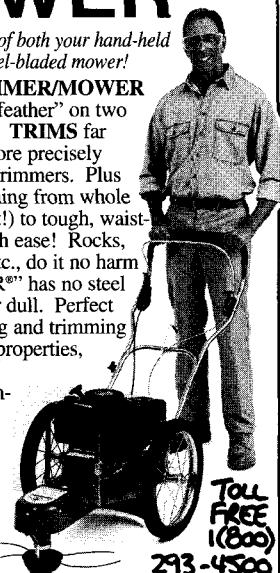
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were now devouring its perpetrators. Gordon's thesis made him less sympathetic to their quandary than common humanity warrants. Managers are people too. A capitalism without workers: is that where this destructive madness will end? Better Fat and Mean, say I, than Lean and Mean.

WHY did stockholders and boards of directors of corporate America permit the bureaucratic burden to grow? Is productivity growth higher among our management-light, non-Big-Stick-wielding industrial competitors? (Hint: yes.) Why has computerization fed instead of cut the Fat? How have U.S. corporations that have not used the Big Stick fared relative to their meaner competitors? Haven't quality-of-work-life programs blunted the stick? (Hint: no.) For the answers to questions like these, see Gordon's book.

It ends, as I will, with a list of negative and positive incentives for corporate America to drop the Big Stick and stop the wage squeeze affecting 80 percent of U.S. workers before it triggers bread riots—and causes goods to pile up in stores because wage-challenged consumers are unable to buy them. In a sign that consumer demand is in fact contracting, at least eight major retailers filed for bankruptcy last year, and analysts were predicting more filings this year in the wake of the miserable Christmas shopping season, which saw mainly upscale retailers, who cater to the top 20 percent of the work force, enjoy good sales.

The biggest negative incentive would be to change the law so that unions can fight back against the Big Stick. Union membership tracks the decline in wages. Unions got clobbered in the eighties, when corporate America implemented the Big Stick and the Reagan Administration staffed the National Labor Relations Board with conservatives who rejected unfair-labor-practice complaints against corporations at a record rate. The saddest chart in Gordon's book shows a straight line running down the page—the decline in union membership from 35 percent of the work force forty years ago to less than 15 percent in 1994. The union wage, as a study by David Card and Alan B. Krueger, of Princeton University, has shown, puts upward pressure on all wages, and so all workers have a stake in union expansion. Gordon rec-

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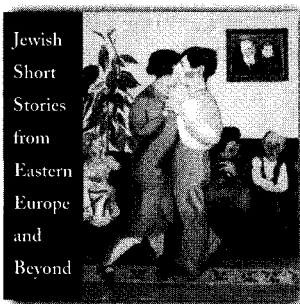
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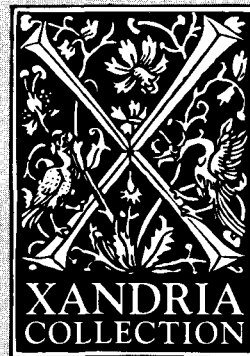
ommended simple changes in the law that would make it easier for unions to organize and would allow all but the top managerial employees to join.

Among his other recommendations:

- Finance Social Security out of general revenues, as most other advanced countries do, instead of from a separate tax on payrolls, so that employers would not be able to avoid the tax by hiring temps.
- Raise the minimum wage from \$4.25 to \$6.50 an hour over four years, and index it to increases in the cost of living. This would give a fillip to wages and especially to the wages of women, since 58.8 percent of employed women work at or below the minimum wage. In a numerically surprising analysis, Gordon showed how the wages of more than 20 million workers have been negatively affected by the fall in the real value of the minimum wage.
- Extend a variety of direct subsidies to firms that drop the Big Stick. How would a company demonstrate its reform? Perhaps by sharing the fruits of productivity increases with workers instead of lavishing them on executive pay raises and corporate dividends.
- Mandate vacations of at least three weeks, which, Gordon wrote, would "contribute to breaking down the artificial distinctions . . . between full-time and part-time employees," and make other changes in the Fair Labor Standards Act to enhance the benefits and job security of disposable or contingent workers, who number upwards of nine million and the growth of whose presence in the work force since the 1970s dolefully has coincided with the decline in real wages.

These steps make economic sense. The Big Stick is killing the economy. But corporate America will vigorously fight any such reforms through its well-funded political arm, the Republican congressional majority. Dick Arme, the Republican majority leader in the House, says *eliminating* the minimum wage is his idea of a moral issue. As for the Democrats, they, too, depend on corporate campaign contributions. President Clinton won the election in part by promising to raise the minimum wage, but he reneged to win corporate support for NAFTA, a kick in the teeth to the low-wage workers who voted for him in 1992. In a statement indicative of the attitude of the Administration, Vice President Herbert

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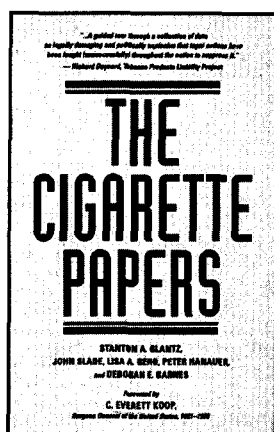
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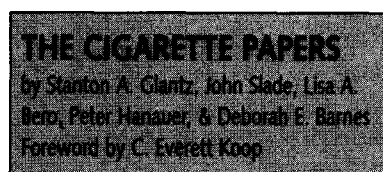
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Hoover Gore, speaking before a New Hampshire chamber of commerce, benignly depicted AT&T's huge layoffs as a "natural impulse . . . to change and to become as efficient as possible."

Pat Buchanan doesn't talk this way about corporate downsizing, nor does Massachusetts Governor William Weld, at the other end of Republican politics. Word from inside the Clinton Administration is that Dick Morris, the consultant-guru of Clinton's re-election campaign, who has peddled his versatile counsel to Republicans like Jesse Helms and Trent Lott, is telling Cabinet members to stop talking about economic insecurity. The economy is great, and it's our

economy—that's the Morris message that Gore was parroting in New Hampshire. Under Clinton the Democrats have lost any claim to economic populism just when circumstances are giving it a new lease on emotion and plausibility.

We are at a paradoxical moment in economic history, when what is in the broad interest of all U.S. corporations—well-paid worker-customers—may not be in the narrow interest of any one corporation. And government, which should assert the national interest in resolving this paradox, is throwing up its hands. The relative optimism in Gordon's book springs from the economic facts. The political facts warrant despair. ☞

BRIEF REVIEWS



A Fez of the Heart

by Jeremy Seal.

Harcourt Brace, 352 pages,
\$14.00.

Mr. Seal, who has worked in Turkey and speaks the language, made a winter circuit through nontourist areas of the country and surely knew what to expect. His complaints about cold, snow, and mud, winds outside and drafts inside, consequently arouse more impatience than pity. When he is not lamenting the weather, Mr. Seal collects engaging and valuable information about, of all things, headgear—which has meant a great deal to Turks in the past and still does. The turban was banned in 1826 by a sultan ambitious to push his country into the nineteenth century. Its official successor, the fez, was banned in 1925 by Kemal Atatürk, for similarly progressive reasons. A poorly made apology for the fez may now be worn by tourists, but a fez-wearing Turk risks arrest. In hunting for a good fez or a surviving fez maker (he found one: an Armenian), Mr. Seal gathered ambivalent Turkish opinions about the West—resentful suspicion on the one

hand, moderate emulation on the other—along with much uncertainty about what the true character of the Turkish nation is or should be. In its combination of history, current attitudes, and sometimes comic misadventure, this hunt for a hat is intelligent travel writing about a trip that does not arouse any impulse toward emulation.

The Vinland Map and the Tartar Relation

by R. A. Skelton, Thomas E. Marston,
and George D. Painter. Yale,
291 pages, \$45.00.

The Vinland Map (and the attached diplomatic report), dated circa 1440, was first published in 1965, as the earliest European depiction of any part of the Americas. It was hailed with joy by many historians and denounced as a forgery by others, including Samuel Eliot Morison. After chemical tests of the ink the map was indeed identified as a forgery. Yale, undeterred, arranged further tests and has now reissued the 1965 book with additional material by Wilcomb E. Washburn, Thomas A. Cahill and Bruce H. Kusko,

and Laurence C. Witten II. Mr. Cahill and Mr. Kusko, who supervised the recent tests of the map, report that their examination proves that the earlier tests were inadequate and that the ink may be of fifteenth-century origin. They "do not claim therefore that the map is authentic." The late Laurence Witten, the book dealer who originally procured the map, describes its acquisition and incidentally gives an intimidating account of the hazards of the trade. The cartographic study by the late R. A. Skelton, the superintendent of the Map Room of the British Museum, in which the author did his best to evade the visual evidence on which Admiral Morison based his charge of forgery, appears in its original form, but the evidence is still there. The authentic medieval maps here illustrated for comparison with the Vinland version have something in common: they all require a viewer accustomed to modern maps to make serious revisions of focus and approach in order to understand what is represented. This is not true of the Vinland Map. Asia and Africa are easily readable, and the North Atlantic, despite the presence of two imaginary islands (a cartographic fashion of the fifteenth century), is instantly familiar territory, Greenland being depicted in terms suspiciously close to those of a modern atlas. Greenland is the camel. Skelton resorted to a series of unsupported suppositions in the attempt to worry the animal down to swallowable size, but it remains a very large camel. Anyone who expects this handsome new edition to authenticate the Vinland Map as a pre-Columbian creation will be disappointed.

Confessions of an Igloo Dweller

by James Houston.
Houghton Mifflin/Peter Davison,
320 pages, \$24.95.

Flying free in return for pumping gas and hauling lines, Mr. Houston first reached Arctic Canada in 1948, armed with a little baggage and a sketchbook. He fell in love with the country and the friendly, kindly, generous Inuit, and by one means or another managed to stay until 1962. An artist himself (and a good one, as his illustrations prove), he also fell in love with Inuit art and worked to introduce it to connoisseurs worldwide. This

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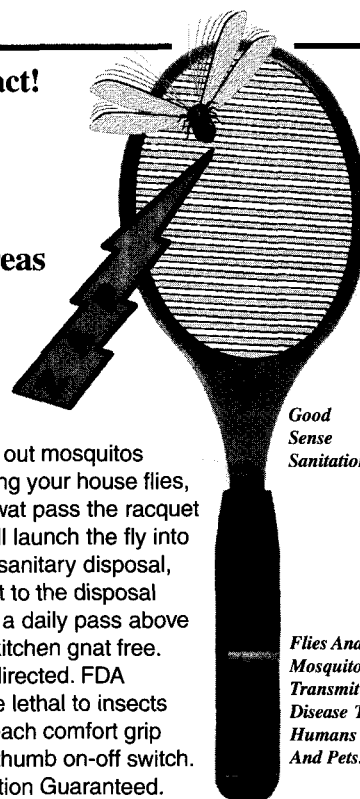
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campaign was of great financial benefit to the Inuit, and Mr. Houston's account of his experiences with dog teams, igloos, walrus hunts, near disasters, and unexpected absurdities is sure to benefit any reader with a taste for operations in the last days of a now-vanished frontier.

The Tennis Party

by Madeleine Wickham.
St. Martin's/Thomas Dunne,
240 pages, \$22.95.

The point of the party is not tennis but money and the resulting nuances of English social position. Ms. Wickham has a shrewdly malicious touch with her characters, among them a memorably awful foot-in-the-mouth young woman, and keeps a deft balance between black and drawing-room comedy.

"Exterminate All the Brutes!"

by Sven Lindqvist,
translated by Joan Tate. The New Press,
192 pages, \$20.00.

The author presents the casual murder of native peoples by European colonial powers as a logical prelude to and eventual cause of the Nazi murder of Jews. It is a reasonable argument but hardly surprising. Genocide goes back to—and beyond—Genghis Khan.

Kraven Images

by Alan Isler.
Bridge Works, 264 pages,
\$21.95.

Mr. Isler's novel is part academic satire on a thesis on "Displaced Eroticism in the Fiction of Early Nineteenth-Century Women Writers" and similar enterprises, part sexual burlesque, and part a gallery of grotesques, all these elements ultimately converging in an Oedipal swamp. None of it is as amusing as the author seemingly intended it to be.

Real Fast Food

by Nigel Slater.
Overlook Press, 320 pages,
\$23.95.

Mr. Slater is described as a popular and influential cookery writer in Britain. He proves to be something of a throw-back to a more ample age, when it was thought that anything but a dill pickle

was the better for a scoop of butter and a slosh of cream. He is opinionated ("I am as suspicious of a tidy kitchen as I am of a tidy desk") and a purveyor of odd information (frozen fish sticks "were originally marketed in Britain as 'crispy cod-pieces'"), and in general an enlivening companion. If mere reading can be trusted, he is a good cook.

William Bartram: Travels and Other Writings

with notes by Thomas P. Slaughter.
The Library of America,
749 pages, \$37.50.

Bartram (1739–1823) was a son of the great John Bartram, revered as "the father of American botany." William was also a botanist, and an explorer of the southeastern areas of what is now the United States. The writings collected here for the first time, with the author's excellent drawings, are fascinating, both for what Bartram saw and for what he thought about it. He reported sympathetically on Creek and Cherokee Indians, and he foresaw that increasing settlement would destroy the wilderness that he loved and skillfully described. He was subject to spasms of piety and fine writing in correct eighteenth-century style, but sound on practical matters such as weather (generally good) and roads (generally bad). His account of camping, alone, on what turned out to be a small peninsula with overactive "crocodiles" on the river banks and a couple of bear on the neck fairly raises a reader's hair. Bartram has been somewhat overshadowed by his father. He is worth knowing for his own sake.

Archyology

by Don Marquis.
University Press of New England,
104 pages, \$14.95.

Some years ago Jeff Adams, a Marquis buff, turned up a trove of papers containing a number of works by archy the cockroach which had escaped inclusion in any Marquis anthology. Four appeared at the time in *The Atlantic*, but problems with illustrations have delayed book publication until the present. Now, happily for true archyphiles and admirers of subtle encroachment, here they all are, with witty drawings by Ed Frascino.

—Phoebe-Lou Adams



THE PUZZLER

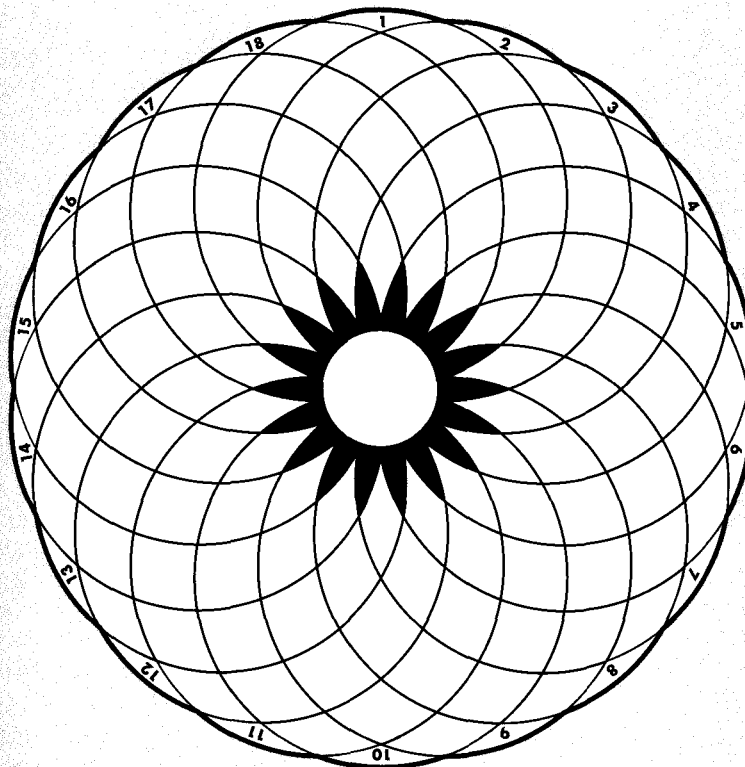
by Emily Cox and Henry Rathvon

Flower Cuttings

This puzzle's 36 entries are clued in pairs, one going clockwise and the other going counterclockwise in the arcs from the number they share in the border toward the diagram's center. (No letters fall in numbered spaces.) It is up to the solver to determine which entry goes in which direction. Most answers are six letters long, but some are seven letters long and must have a letter cut before entry. Letters that are cut may be removed to the line below the diagram. Also, each of the 36 clues contains an extraneous letter that must be cut in order for the clue to lead to a correct solution. The 36 letters cut from the clues will spell, in order, a ten-word cryptic clue; letters cut from the diagram entries (also in order) will form its solution.

Clue answers include four proper nouns and an uncommon word at 3 (clued second).

The solution to last month's Puzzler appears on page 121.



Clues

- | | | |
|--|--|---|
| 1. ___ Fad brought back obscure kind of rose | ___ School sport cut short | 12. ___ Marcel in terror is quieter |
| ___ Turkey sandwiches set plunk in cleaned house | 6. ___ All mixed up in some weaving course | ___ Prospero keeps <i>Tempest</i> extremely base |
| 2. ___ Teddy Roosevelt's wife is behind church coup | ___ Guess rum is covered in petition | 13. ___ Bit off stem, and pressed rose |
| ___ Loud sound by wren returning for meal | 7. ___ Play includes hit routine | ___ Member of Juliet's family allowed on the east side of Capua |
| 3. ___ Eve's son taking in Eve's collapse (<i>two words</i>) | ___ Gem for every idiot | 14. ___ Materials were located by inns |
| ___ Struck in California, leave out of a count | 8. ___ Gourmet coffee sent after passing river | ___ Race, not changing pace |
| 4. ___ Morse silent about telegraph's first lowly voice? | ___ Red tin carries cakes | 15. ___ Grow wilder at end of stint in marsh |
| ___ Short snapper appeared with shelled crab | 9. ___ Pass the hat first with French composer | ___ Picked out copper, large wads first |
| 5. ___ Oil inside damages food processors? | ___ Eating doughnut, turned surprisingly plump | 16. ___ Bonsai going to pot in warm site |
| | 10. ___ To get office equipment, I'm interrupting manager? | ___ Planter of fear carrying weapon |
| | ___ Rib running back: "Houston player is chicken" | 17. ___ Half of lead goes into clasps for bracelets |
| | 11. ___ Dears stocking party ribbon | ___ Turn set off with audio equipment |
| | ___ Famous rock musicians attend less | 18. ___ Plunger, see, for manifold |
| | | ___ Threaten to go drown computer? |

Note: The instructions above are for this month's puzzle only. It is assumed that you know how to decipher clues. For a complete introduction to clue-solving, send an addressed, stamped long envelope to The Atlantic Puzzler, 745 Boylston Street, Boston, Mass. 02116.

WORD COURT

by Barbara Wallraff

For a recipe, my wife requested that I get her some “shelled almonds.” I knew that she meant “whole almonds sans shells”; however, Generation X employees at three stores showed me whole almonds with their shells intact. At one of the three I overheard a young employee joking with another regarding my (to her) confused request. What does Ms. Grammar think of my recent forays into the world of retail customer service?

Thomas J. Walach
Chicago, Ill.

It is curious that a person is said to be *undressed* and a package *unwrapped*, whereas an almond and a potato in comparable states are properly called *shelled* and *peeled*. In cases like these the two forms reflect a thought pattern in which *un* designates tasks that remain to be done or have been reversed (*unwashed*, *unpacked*, *untied*), and the lack of *un* designates tasks that have been done involving some kind of removal (*skinned*, *guted*, *cored*). Ignorance of such niceties of our language, it seems to me, is its own punishment.

When I am sick, I often say “I do not feel well.” My husband always



corrects me, saying that I must be talking about my tactile senses, and tells me to say “I do not feel good.” I tell him that I have yet to see a “Get Good Soon” sympathy card at the card shop. Am I wrong?

Linda Armstrong
Liberty, Mo.

No, you’re not. *Feel* confuses people because it can serve either as a garden-variety transitive or intransitive verb or as a slightly more rarefied “copula,” or linking verb. Consider the difference between “When I check the dog for ticks, I *feel* carefully behind his ears” and “When I check the dog for ticks, I feel like a responsible person: I *feel* careful.”

In the first case *feel* is being modified by an adverb (*carefully*). In the second case it is linking the subject to an adjective (*careful*), which is modifying not the verb but the subject itself. (To confirm our grasp of this point, let’s ponder what “I *feel* badly” means. Despite what most people seem to think, *badly* is an adverb only, and therefore it must be modifying *feel*. This sentence, then, does have to do with a deficient tactile sense. “I *feel* bad” is the way to signify discomfiture.)

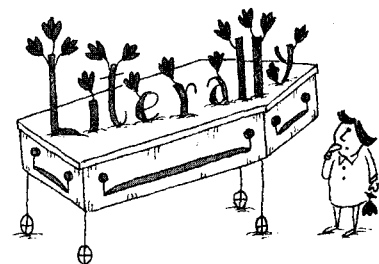
Well, too, confuses people, and for a similar reason: it can serve either as an adverb, modifying a verb (“He swims *well* now that he has taken lessons”), or as an adjective, modifying a noun or pronoun (“He is *well* now that he has taken his medicine”). As you can see, the two constructions can look quite a lot alike—the difference is in what they mean.

Indeed, “I *feel* well” could be referring to your tactile abilities—just as “Time flies when you’re having fun” could be a command. The only thing is, it’s not. “I *feel* well” is a perfectly good way to describe your state of health. “I *feel* good” would also work well—although it is perhaps more descriptive of a mental state.

Isaw this sentence in a local newspaper today, in an article about a football player: “Against the Vols’ four toughest opponents . . . Manning literally performed surgery on some of the conference’s best defenses.” And in a piece by Daniel Patrick Moynihan in The New York Review of Books: “On the minority side an enormous fuss is

now being made over adding a little extra child care, some odd bits of child nutrition aid, perhaps a little foster care: literally arranging flowers on the coffin of the provision for children in the Social Security Act.” I have noticed such usages of the word *literally* many times in the past few years—that is, as a term of emphasis. What is your feeling about the correctness of this usage? What might serve as an alternative—one that preserves the original meaning of *literally* yet at the same time allows writers to convey the emphasis they evidently so desire?

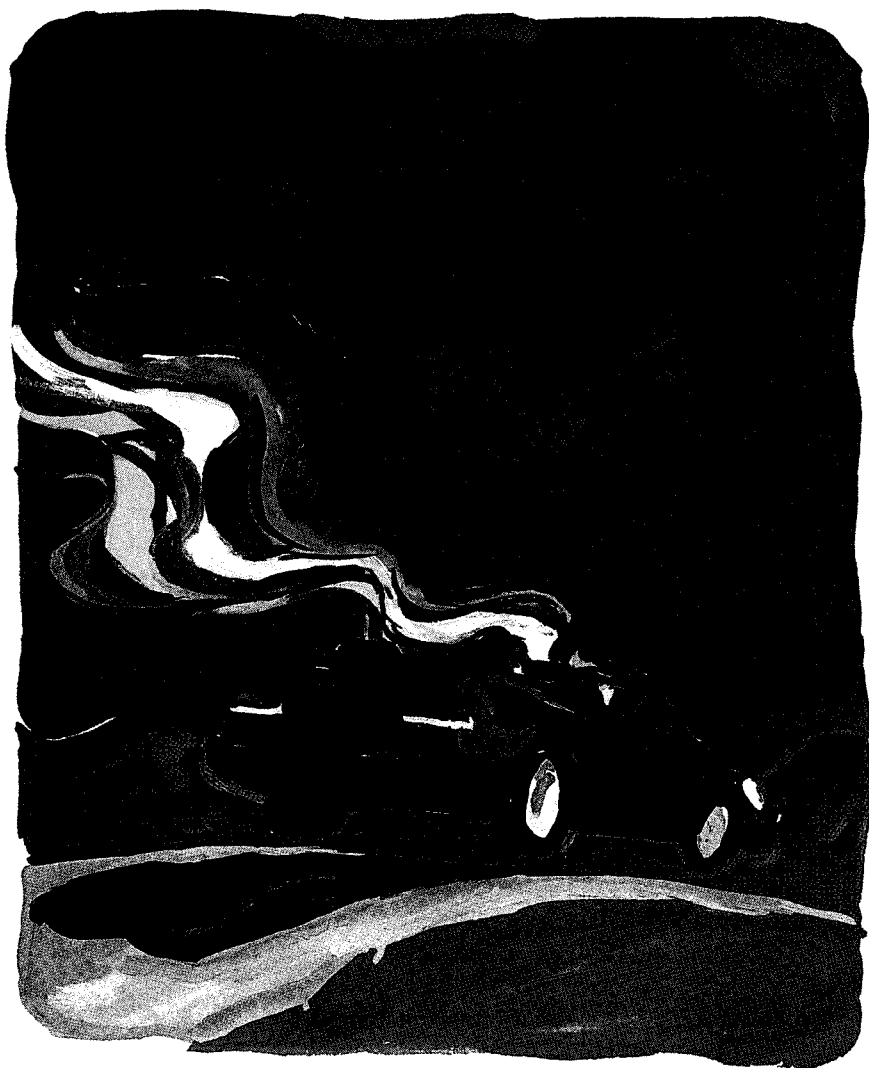
Jim Johnston
Chattanooga, Tenn.



The figurative use of *literally* is like the common cold: widespread and evidently incurable. Certainly it’s objectionable. For one thing, the whole idea is self-contradictory. For another, the results are often unintentionally so funny that the speaker or writer might as well have slipped on a banana peel—and few people think it’s good form to do that.

Bless you, though, for recognizing that people who misuse the word have some goal in mind other than to make themselves ridiculous. The best alternative to misusing *literally* tends to be simply to leave it out and let one’s figure of speech do its job. If one doesn’t trust that figure of speech to make the point, then the figure is the problem, and weighing it down with *literally* isn’t going to help.

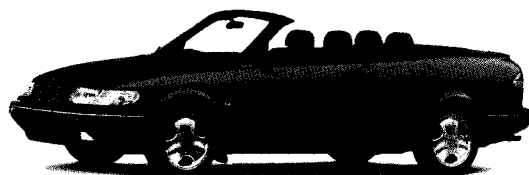
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